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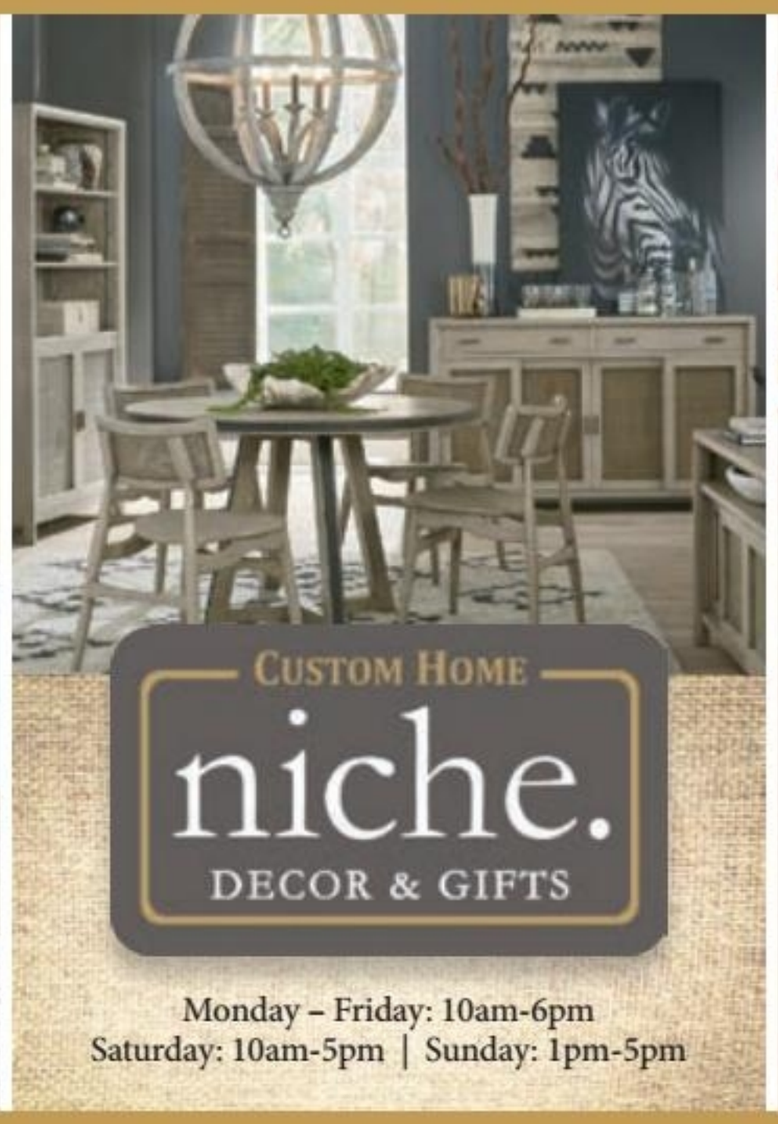

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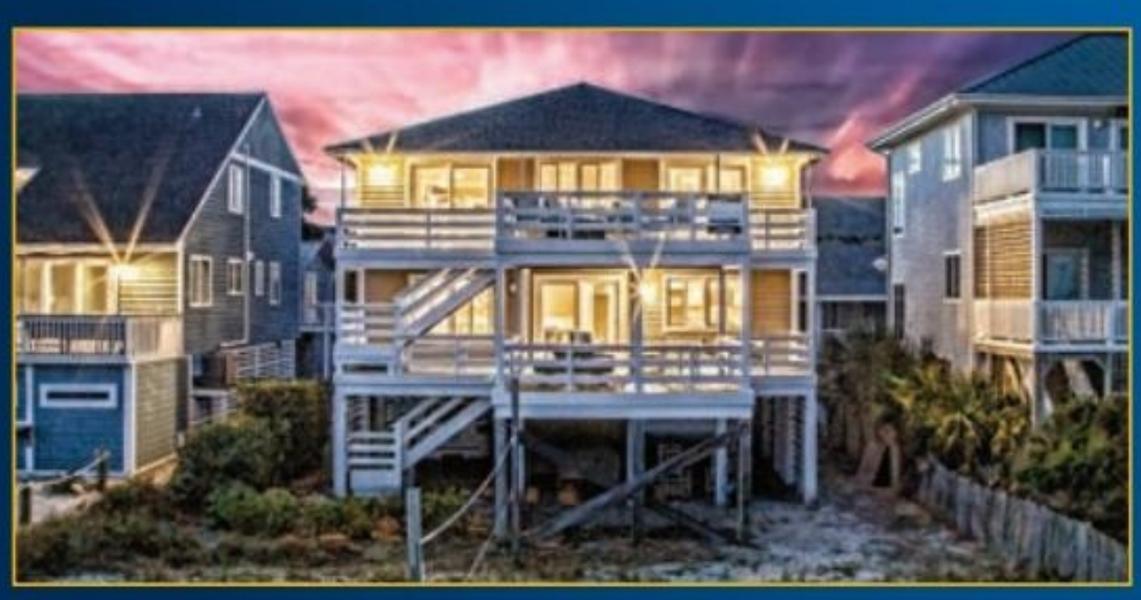

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Mario Marzan, ***Environmental Identities no. 5*** (detail), 2016, mixed media on canvas, 72 × 96 in., Courtesy of the artist, © 2019 Mario Marzan

Front Burner: Highlights in Contemporary North Carolina Painting is organized by guest curator Ashlynn Browning in collaboration with the North Carolina Museum of Art. *Good as Gold: Fashioning Senegalese Women* is organized by Kevin D. Dumouchelle of the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. It is curated by Amanda Maples of the North Carolina Museum of Art. *Leonardo Drew: Making Chaos Legible* is made possible, in part, by the generous support of the Hartfield Foundation and Libby and Lee Buck.

All exhibitions are made possible, in part, by the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources; the North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation, Inc.; and the William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment for Educational Exhibitions. Research for these exhibitions is made possible by Ann and Jim Goodnight/The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fund for Curatorial and Conservation Research and Travel.

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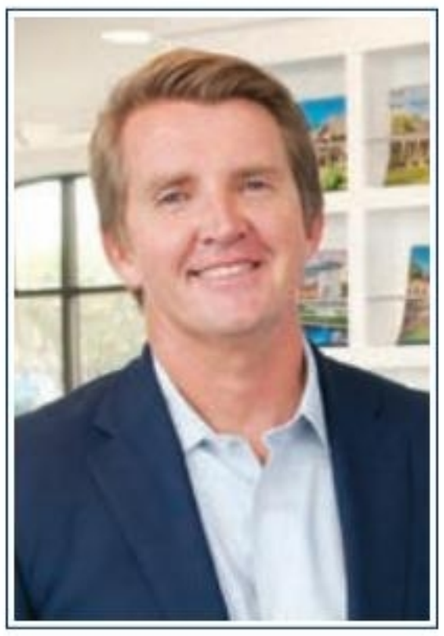

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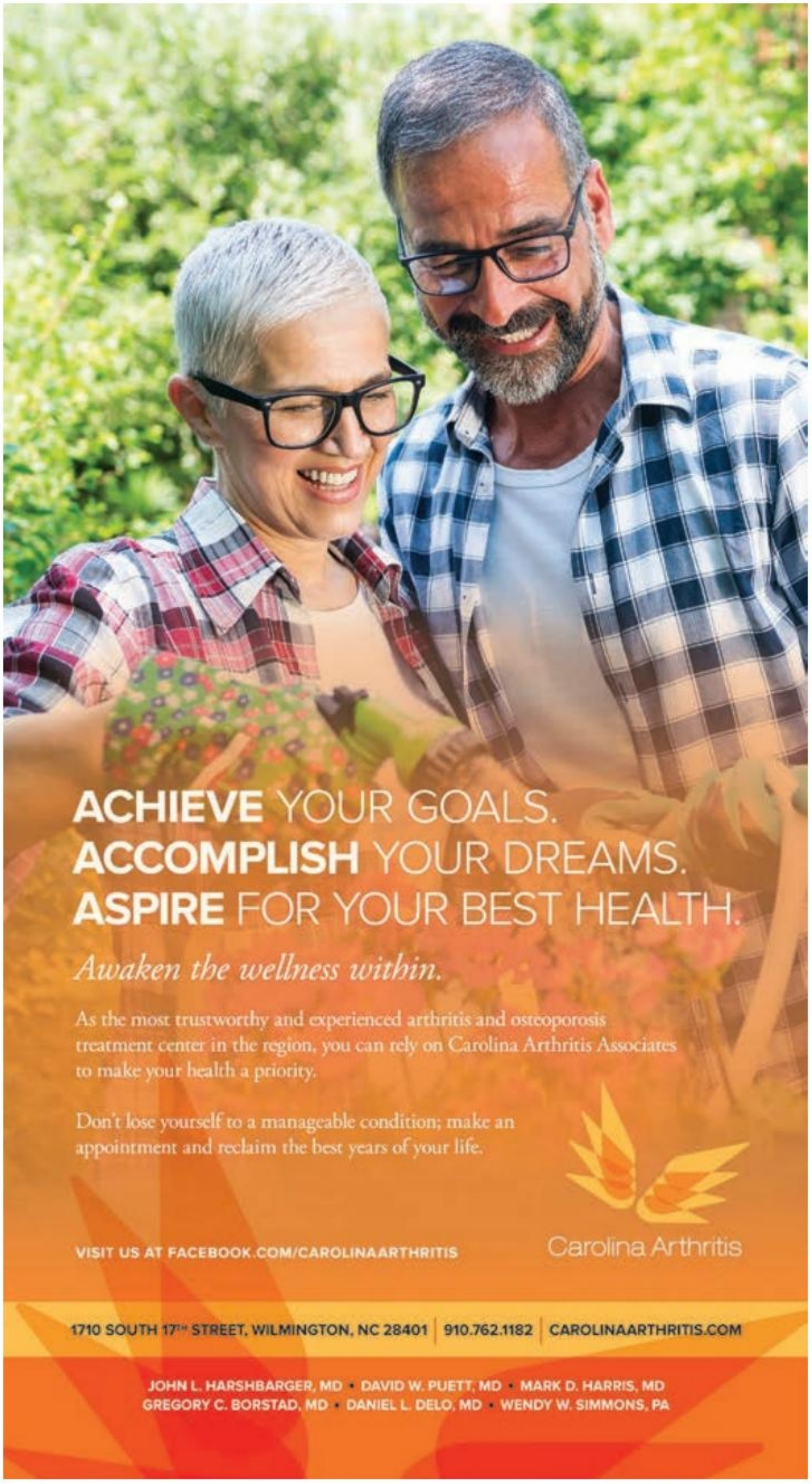
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Salt
MAGAZINE

VOLUME 8, NO. 3

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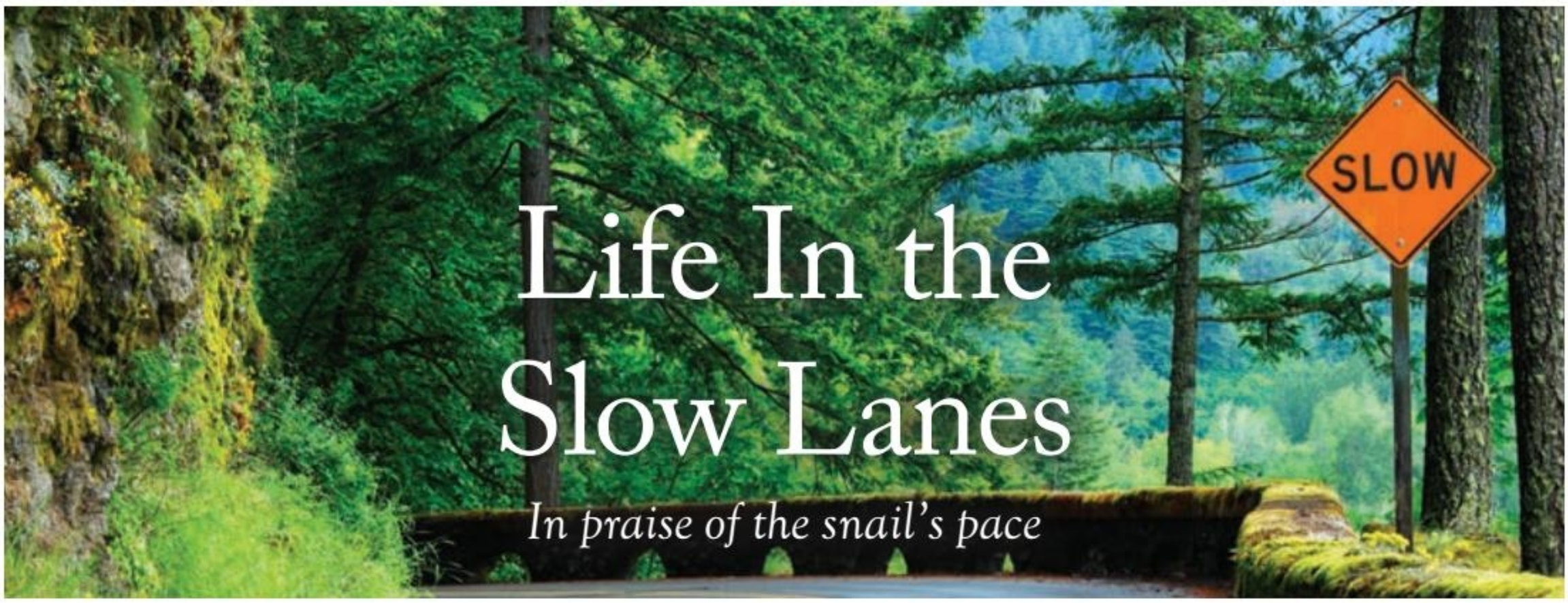

Life In the Slow Lanes

In praise of the snail's pace

By Jim Dodson

The *TED Radio Hour* recently hosted a fascinating program devoted to the art of slowing down.

The program began with a public TV producer from Norway describing how a historic passenger train rigged with multiple wide-angle cameras documented the passing landscape during its daily run between Bergen and Oslo for seven hours and 14 minutes.

There was no voiceover or narrative explanation of the journey — merely the peaceful countryside passing in real time.

The train documentary became a runaway sensation.

What might sound like an elaborate April Fool's joke turned out to be a ratings bonanza when an estimated 1.2 million Norwegians — roughly one-fifth of the country's population — tuned in to watch *Bergensbanen* (*The Bergen Line*), giving birth to a new concept called "Slow TV."

Since that time, similar programs have devoted eight straight hours to Norway's "National Firewood Night," 18 straight hours to salmon fishing, more than eight hours to people knitting and chatting, 60 hours to Norwegian hymn-singing and five-and-a-half days to passengers on a cruise ship.

The producers discovered, in essence, that viewers are longing for something authentic, something that minute-by-minute matches the pace of actual living, not manufactured "reality" shows that simulate or distort events in real time. In a world forever speeding up, Norwegians seemed eager to slow down and smell the roses — or at least watch them grow.

Another *TED* stage segment featured an efficiency-driven professor from The Wharton School of Economics who learned a valuable lesson in the art of procrastination — how "slowing down" can be a boon to personal creativity — from a pair of his business school students who took six months just to come up with a name for their proposed business idea, right up to the project's deadline.

The company name the students finally came up with was Warby Parker, which evolved into a billion-dollar eyewear firm that was recently named the world's "Most Innovative Company," proving the timeless maxim that all good things come in time — and often require lots of it.

Among other insights professor Adam Grant gleaned from the experience — including his own subsequent efforts to teach himself to procrastinate — is that putting something aside often aids in refining the outcome; that human beings possess a better memory for incomplete tasks that stay active in the mind than hastily produced results; and that, in the end, our biggest regrets are not what we failed to accomplish — but what we never took the necessary time to try to do well.

"What some people call procrastination," professor Grant says, quoting screenwriter Adam Sorkin, "I call *thinking*."

In a world where feedback is as instantaneous as a nasty Tweet, the faster we move through our days, the professor concluded, the less inclined we are to pause and reflect on methods that might produce a better outcome.

As one who has consciously been "slowing down" for years, it was reassuring to discover there are others in the world who believe there is great value — not to mention improved perspective and sanity — in taking the time to do the job right, to slow down and think it through, to measure twice and cut once or simply stop and buy some of those proverbial roses, whatever cliché works for you.

Pausing to think about this, I do believe it was the house and garden I built on a forested hill in Maine two decades ago that brought this important lesson home to bear.

The year it took to clear the land and rebuild the ancient stone walls that once defined an 18th-century farmstead gave me time to conceive and refine the plans for the house, which took an additional nine months to actually construct with the help of a pair of skilled

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post-and-beam housewrights. Creating the interior of the house (which I largely did on my own — building walls and floors, custom designing and making bookshelves and the kitchen cabinetry) also underwent several revisions and took at least three more months to complete than planned. In the end, just about everything about that house pleased me and suited my young family perfectly.

In a sense, the forest around us and the ambitious landscape garden I subsequently set out to create conveyed an even more enlightening lesson about the value of taking one's own sweet time.

Nature keeps her own clock, and a northern woodland can't be rushed into leafing out in spring or fading away in autumn. Summer's lease in Maine may seem all too brief while winter can feel maddeningly endless. And yet, as I learned, watching the seasons come and go at their own pace was like attending a seminar in the art of Slow TV, a chance to absorb the beauty and spiritual messages of a living world that follows an ancient dance as old as the stars.

Any gardener worth his composted cow manure understands that the life of a garden is a slow-moving and somewhat mysterious affair, relying on faith, patience and years, if not decades, of learning about plants and their needs from others who are wiser than you about the art of coaxing living things from the soil.

Even my work as a journalist and author — always facing one kind of deadline or another — reminds me of the importance to take my time and get the story right.

At the end of summer in 2017, I set out to travel along the Great Wagon Road from Philadelphia to Augusta, Georgia. I calculated that a three-week jaunt investigating the historic towns and people who reside along arguably America's most historic Colonial-era road would give me a wealth of material for a book on the very road that brought my European forebears — and possibly yours — to the Southern frontier.

As of last week, I've officially clocked more than 2,500 miles traveling the 780-mile road and am now starting into my third year of researching the astonishing life of this ancient American pathway, constantly learning new things and unearthing stories that demand time to pause and take a deeper look, to linger and reflect, to pursue new leads and find the facts.

It's been an unexpected and bewitching journey, to say the least, something akin to a personal Chautauqua that has immeasurably enriched my life and understanding of America. I shall almost hate to see it reach its conclusion, probably sometime in early summer when I finally cross the Savannah River at Augusta.

For the record, I've rewritten the book's prologue and first five chapters at least half a dozen times already, discovering as I do how the work comes a little more alive and compelling each time out, proving strength resides in careful (and sometimes slow) revision. Hopefully, my brilliant young editor at Simon & Schuster will agree, whenever he finally gets the book.

Not for the first time, traveling the Wagon Road has also reinforced my self-awareness that I am a natural slow-lanes traveler who will always choose the winding two-lane roads if at all possible.

If past truly is prelude to the future — or at least the present — this instinctual habit was likely encouraged by my first job as a cub

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Looking back, I realize those slow road adventures were an education unto themselves, a great way to begin my writing career. It was maybe the most fun job I've ever had.

All of which may explain why, as the world seems to speed up with each passing day, I remain a committed slow-lanes traveler who is in no particular rush to get where he's going. What I supposedly lose in time by avoiding Interstates and super highways, I gain back double in terms of perspective and peace of mind by passing through beautiful countryside and small towns where time moves at a slower pace. Come spring, roadside produce stands seem to whisper my name.

Recently I flew a long way on an airplane, about a dozen hours in the air each way.

I took the slow way there and back.

Airports are increasingly noisy places with folks rushing frantically about. But once I'm in the air, locked in a silver bird soaring as high as 40,000 feet above the Earth, it's such a pleasure to read an entire book or simply sit and think about life as I gaze out at continents of clouds.

On this trip, I discovered that one of the video channels featured its own version of Slow TV — 45-minute film loops showing either a serene rainforest or the restless ocean on the craggy Northwest Coast.

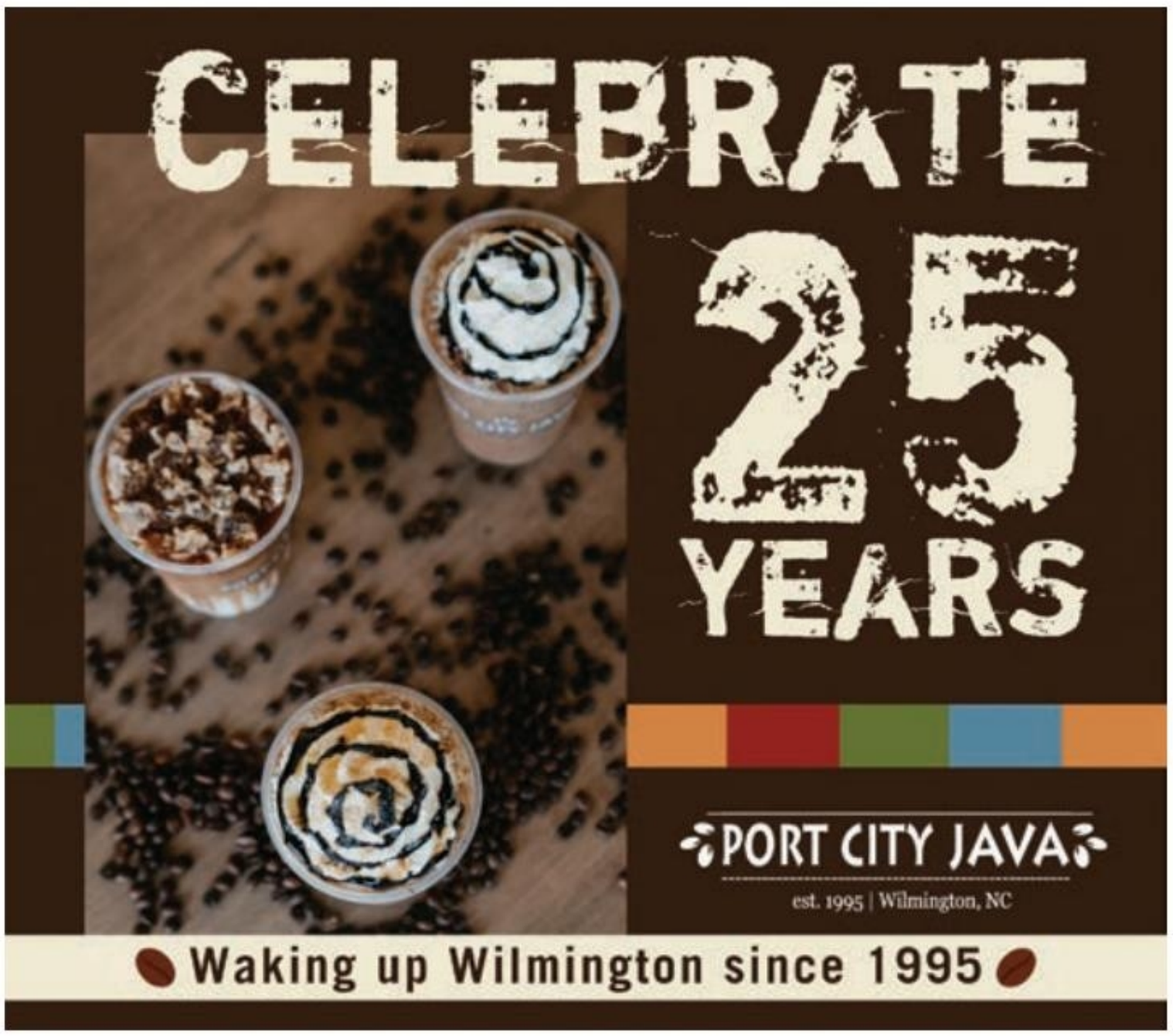
I watched both films — twice.

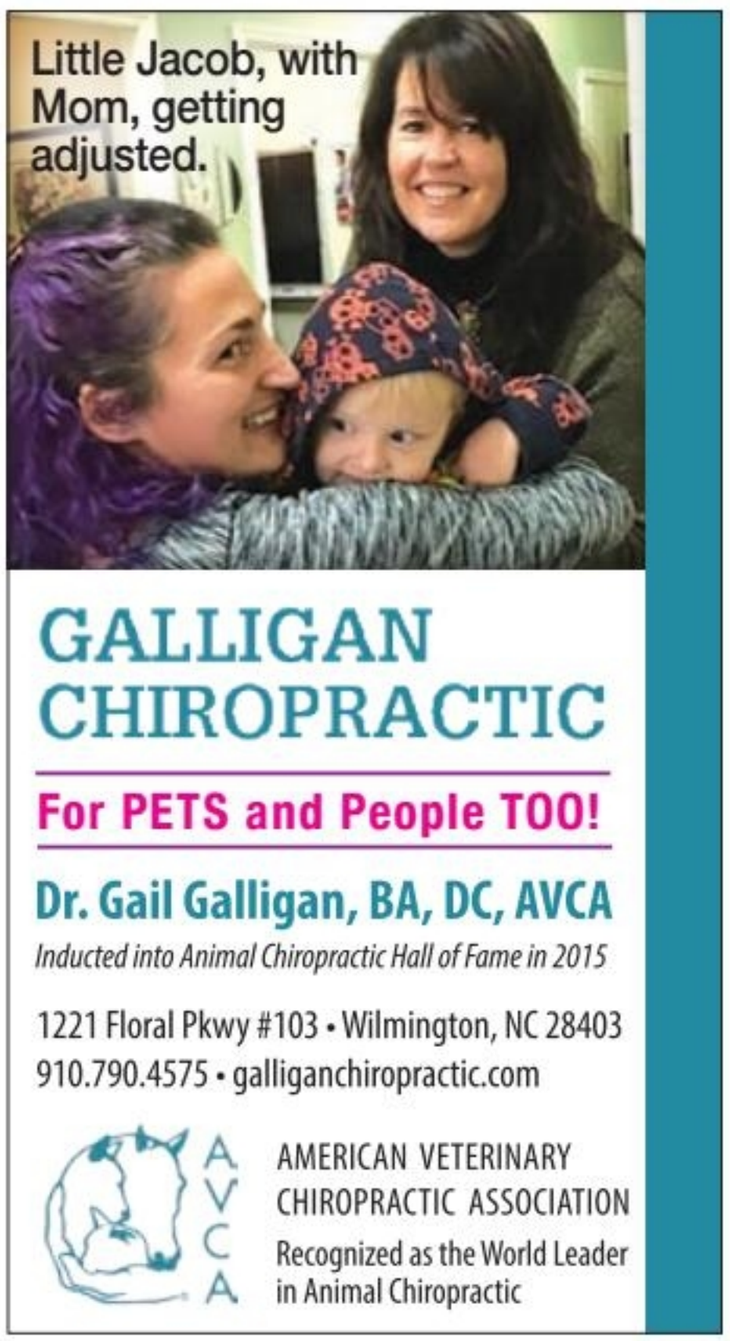
Someday I may graduate to "National Firewood Night" or 60 hours of Norwegians singing hymns, but for now that rainforest and restless sea worked their magic on my high-flying soul.

"Does anything actually *happen* in that movie," my curious seatmate was compelled to ask at one point, unplugging from his action thriller.

"Not much," I admitted. "Isn't it great?"

Contact Editor Jim Dodson at jim@thepilot.com.

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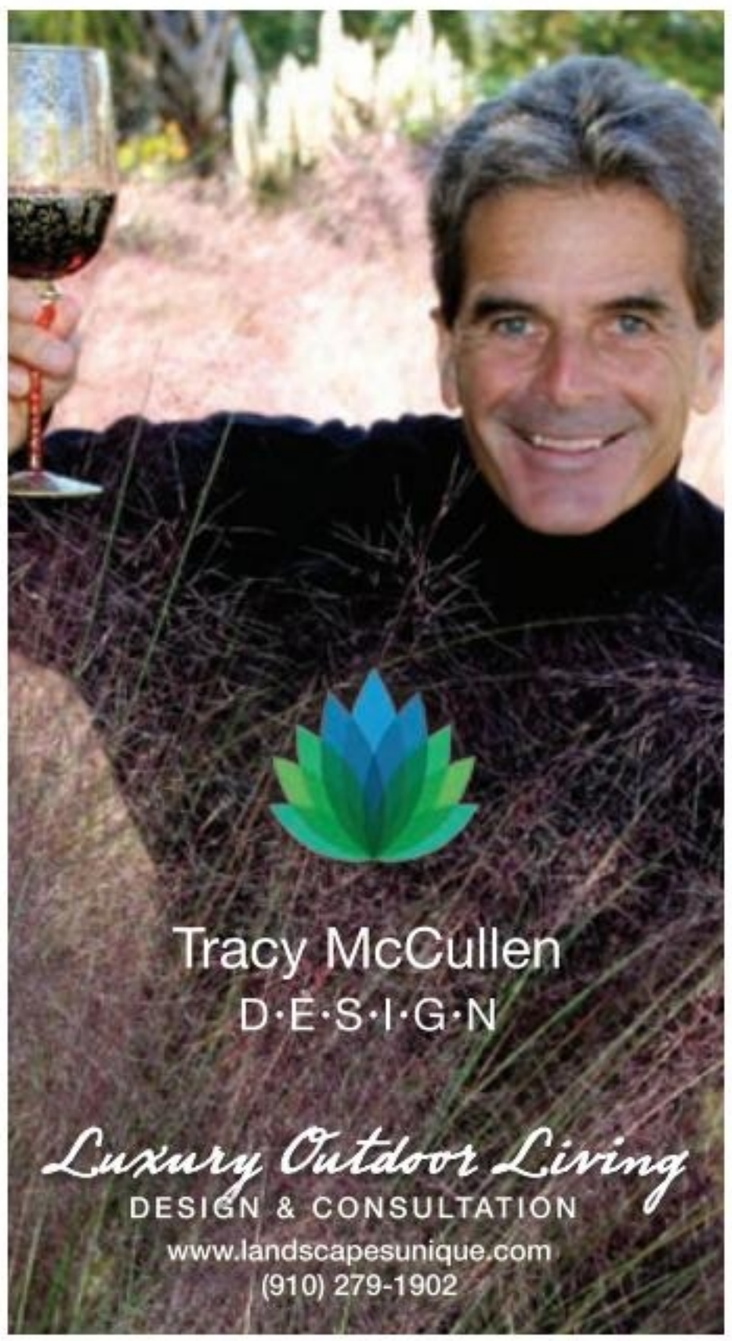

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Beautifully maintained home in move in condition. Open floor plan lends perfectly to entertaining or being in the mist of family. The private study/office with custom built in bookcases, large screened in back porch overlooking the fenced in private yard with manicured landscaping, hardwood floors throughout entire main floor, and tiled baths, are just a few of the many upgrades this home offers. **$348,500**

512 Goldeneye Court

Bayshore Estates

Adorable 4 bedroom, 4 and a half bath home located in the heart of Ogden. Featuring many upgrades as well as a brand new roof! All steel construction and hurricane windows make this house rated to withstand winds of 130 miles per hour! Feel right at home downstairs in the spacious great room with vaulted ceilings and formal dining room, the perfect space for entertaining. The kitchen opens to a large eat-in breakfast room and boasts custom maple cabinetry, granite countertops, stainless appliances, top of the line 6-burner downdraft gas range and double wall ovens. Convenient first floor master with en-suite. Upstairs has two additional bedrooms, each with their own private bath. Extra room upstairs perfect for an office/kids homework space. The impressive finished room above the garage is large enough to be a second master complete with it's own en-suite. Easy to enjoy the backyard while sitting on the covered porch created with Philippine Mahogany flooring. Entire house was constructed with a steel frame, made to withstand 130 mph winds. Home is on well water. Just minutes to beach, marinas, downtown and shopping yet tucked back in a quiet, friendly neighborhood. **$479,900**

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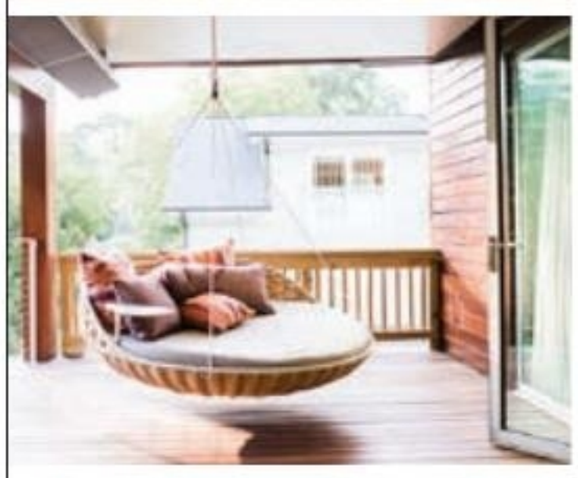

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Low Country Boil

The North Carolina Coastal Federation is devoted to preserving coastal water quality and habitats throughout the state. Tonight the organization hosts its spring fundraiser, a **Low Country Boil** with fresh local shrimp and refreshments. There will also be live music and a coastal-themed silent auction. Tickets: $50-$60. April 18, 5 p.m.-8 p.m. Hanover Seaside Club, 601 S. Lumina Ave., Wrightsville Beach. For info: (252) 393-81815 or nccoast.org/event/2020-low-country-boil.

Given the unusual circumstances currently facing all events and their organizations anyone planning to attend any program, gathering or competition should check in advance to make certain it will happen as scheduled.

Surf's Up for Pro-Ams…

The **Carolina Pro-Am SUP Surf** competition will bring together the world's best professional and amateur paddle surfers (aka SUP) this weekend in Wrightsville Beach. New this year: a Masters Pro division for 40-plus competitors and a First Comp division for first-time competitors. Tickets: Free for spectators. April 17, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.; April 18, 8 a.m.; April 19, 8 a.m. Wrightsville Beach near Crystal Pier. For info: (910) 619-0511 or worldpaddleassociation.com/event/2020-carolina-pro-am.

…and Groms

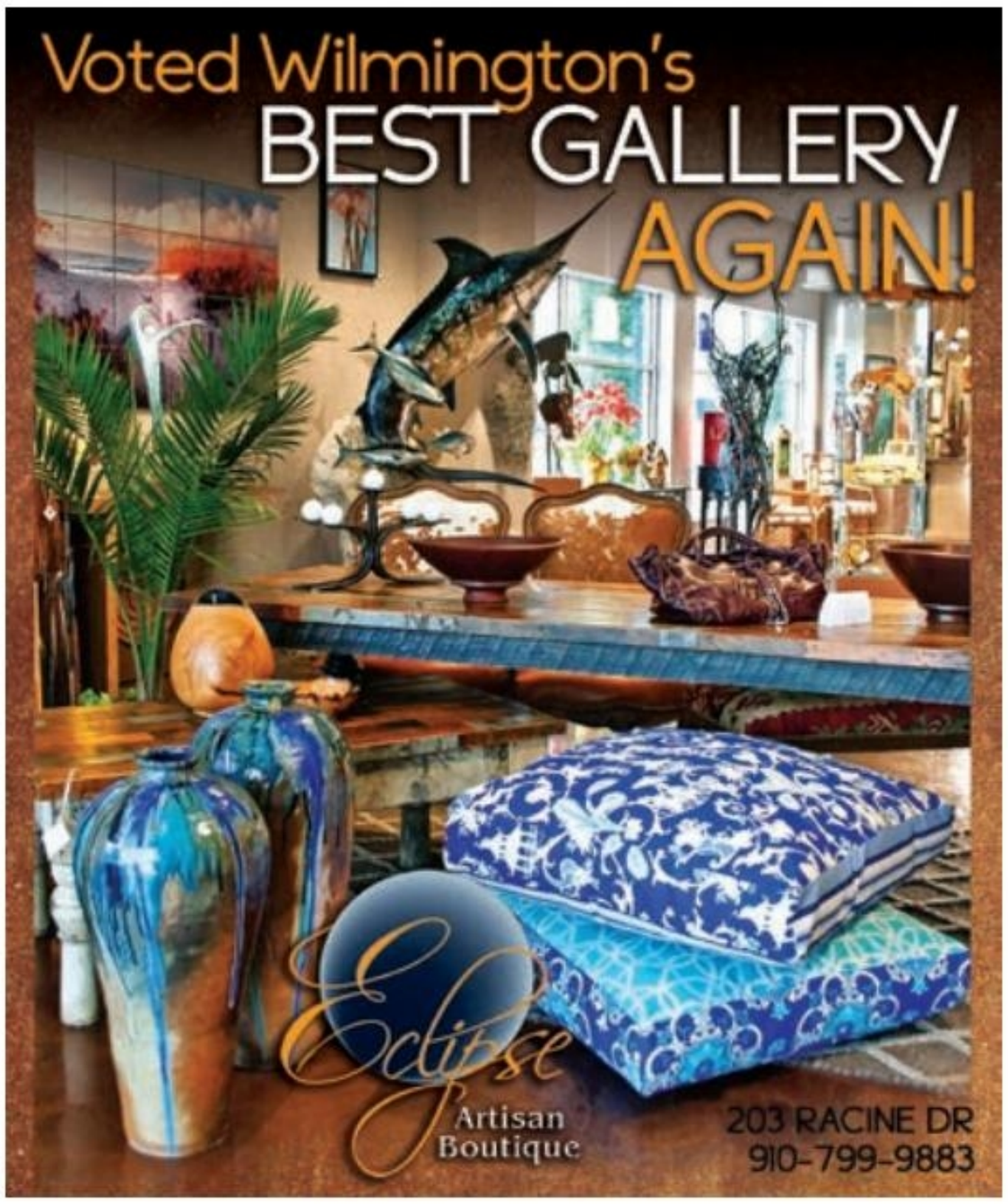
For those of you not up on your lingo, a "grom" (short for grommet) is surfer slang for a young kid who likes to surf. The **O'Neill East Coast Grom Tour,** founded by Seth Broudy, a former professional surfer from Virginia Beach, and Phil Jackson, executive director of Surf Dreams Foundation, is a competitive surf contest for young surfers. The tour comes to Carolina Beach this year for two days of contests and prizes. Divisions include Boys/Girls 10 and under; Boys and Girls Open Longboard, Girls 17 and under, Boys 11-13, 14-17. Tickets: $40 to register; free for spectators. April 18 and 19. Alabama Ave. and S. Lake Park Blvd., Carolina Beach. For info: (910) 458-7005 or eastcoastgrom.surfsignup.com.

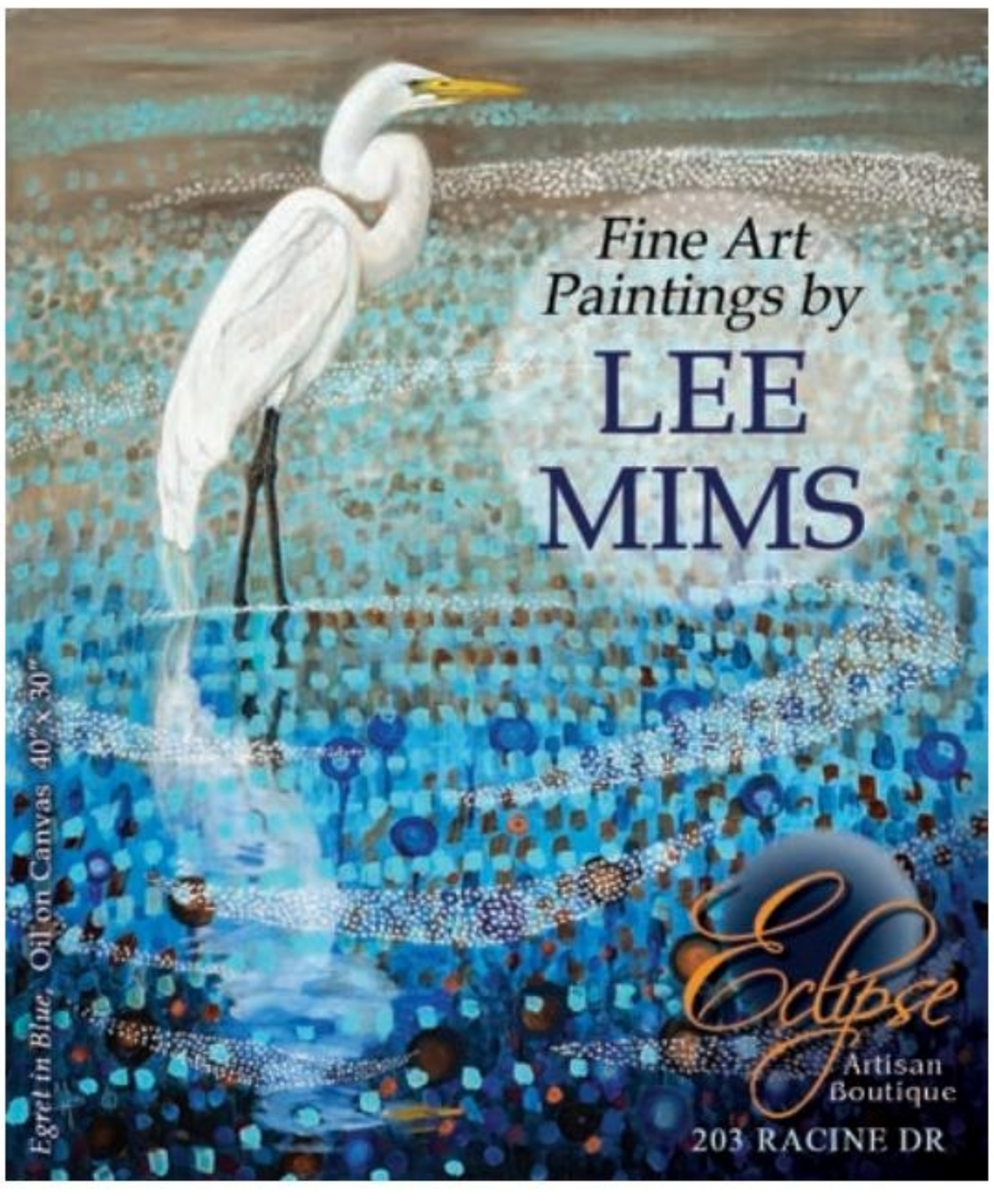
License to Chill

Come spend a mellow afternoon in Kure Beach at the **26th Annual Pleasure Island Seafood Blues and Jazz Festival**. Grammy Award-winning roots music visionary Delbert McClinton and his band, Self-Made Men + Dana, are this year's headliners on the Blues Stage. Among the other musical acts on two separate stages: Carl Newton Review, The Billy Walton Band, The Rhythm Bones, and Rose Lucas and Free Movement. Tickets: $40. April 18, 12 p.m.- 10 p.m. Fort Fisher Air Recreation Area, 118 Riverfront Road, Kure Beach. Info: (910) 458-8434 or pleasureislandnc.org.

Geek Meetup

Calling all comic book superfans: The **Wilmington Geek Expo** is coming to town, a pop-culture convention with anime actors, TV and film stars, comic book authors and artists, and more. Throughout the day there will be panel discussions, gaming and a cosplay contest. Tickets: $10-$20. April 11, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Wilmington Convention Center, 515 Nutt St., Wilmington. For info: (757) 578-5177 or wilmingtongeekexpo.com.





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Sope: Mi Sabor Favorito

By Jason Frye

Take a seat, Taco Tuesday, a new alliterative dinner day that'll tickle your taste buds is here: Sopes Saturdays. I declare that, henceforth, *El sabor del sábado se sope*.

Yes, Saturday's flavor is sope.

Think of sopes as the out-of-town cousin to the tortilla. Both are made with masa — a tasty ground corn dough — but where the tortilla is flat and thin and pliable, the sope is a thick little cake with raised edges. Supposedly, those raised edges help keep the fillings and sauces from slopping out all over your shirt when you go to take a bite, but if you're like me, you'll forgo lifting your sope and eat it with a knife and fork (earning you the taqueria equivalent of going at a slice of New York pizza with a knife and fork: enduring disgusted looks from the fold-and-eat crowd around you), damn the stares and spare the shirt.

I had my first sope at **La Tapatia** (on College by the Harris Teeter and the vape shop, which I know describes the location of one-third of Wilmington, but what can you do?) a few years ago, and since that first bite, I've only varied my order twice (once for huevos rancheros and once for a huarache, a sandal-size sope that was a fascinating, but inferior, lunch choice).

That day, in a fit of boldness, I decided to veer away from my typical order of three tacos and go for one taco and two sopes. The way I figured it, if I didn't like the sopes I only had to eat two, then I could end lunch with a taco, never a bad thing. I took one single knife-and-fork bite of my carnitas sope and told my wife that the extra taco I had was all hers, I was done for good with tacos. (Note: I cannot pass up a taco — unless sopes are an option — and we did have a taco bar at her birthday party in the fall, but I meant it when I said it, so that counts, right?)

She stared at me. Utter nonsense had just poured out of my mouth and a forkful of sope had gone right in. Who willingly gives someone their third taco? Not the man she married, that's for certain, but here I was, foreswearing one of the greatest foods known to mankind, giving it up for something I'd eaten one solitary bite of.

I tried to explain, tried to say that the bottom of the sope was a little crispy from the grill; that the texture was toothsome and corny and delicious like if you doubled — no, tripled — your tortillas to make a gargantuan taco, but there was still a little pillowy softness inside; tried to explain that the pile of lettuce and the pile of meat and the splash of salsa and the crumble of cheese were the perfect commingling of salt, fat, acid and heat, the holy grail of what we crave.

But I couldn't speak. I was chewing. In bliss I was chewing. I chewed with my eyes closed. I chewed fast and slow and never wanted it to end. So I ignored her unasked question. Ignored her look. Pretended no one in the restaurant was staring at the güero eating his sope with a knife and fork and making low sounds one doesn't typically hear in a restaurant. I let it all fade away because, *Dios mio, ese sope es perfección*.

La Tapatia, 820 S. College Road, Wilmington; (910) 397-7707.

Jason Frye is a regular Salt *contributor. You can keep track of what and where he eats by following him on Instagram: @beardedwriter.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK STEELMAN

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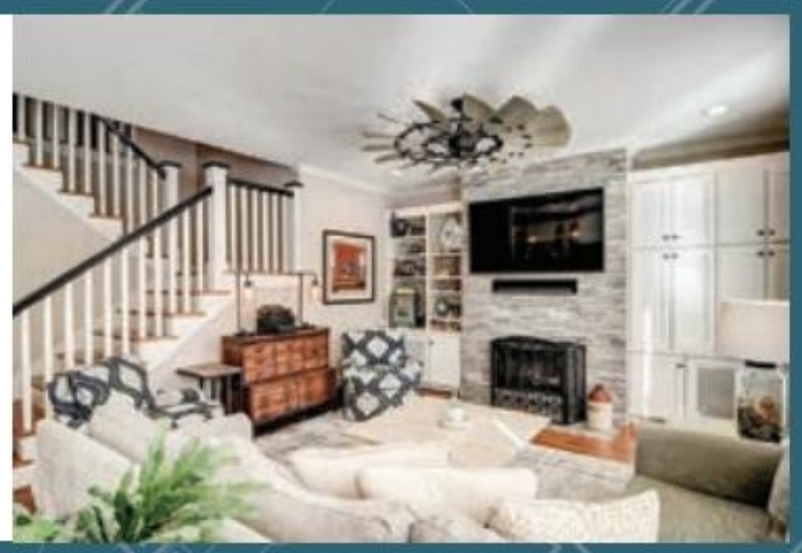

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Belles at the Bridge

Azalea Belles at the Bridge (1990). Photograph by Todd Sumlin

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It was the Cape Fear Garden Club's flower show that planted the seeds for the first Azalea Festival on April 9, 1948. Founded in 1923 and originally known as the Tuesday Book Club, the garden club was already 23 years old when the festival began. The famous Cape Fear Garden Club tours did not begin until 1953.

The first **Azalea Festival** queen was Jacqueline White, an actress best known as the star of *The Narrow Margin*, a film noir involving a detective, strangers on a train, and mob assassins. Thanks to its well-connected organizers, the festival was covered live on ABC Radio News for an estimated audience of 10 million listeners.

In addition to the first Azalea Parade — which had 11 floats, five bands and two military marching units — the festival had recommended garden tours at Airlie, Greenfield Lake and Orton; a song festival at Legion Stadium; and a military band concert at Greenfield Lake. The Coronation Ball was held at Lumina in Wrightsville Beach, where White was crowned Queen Azalea by Gov. Greg Cherry, who (perhaps overserved with Southern hospitality) placed her crown on upside down. — W.I.

Drink America's Best Lagers

April is NC Beer Month
Thursday, April 9: Gnome Painting @ 7
Thursday, April 16: "Friends" Trivia @ 7
Thursday, April 30: "Sex & the City" Trivia @ 7
Fridays: Brewery Tour @ 4:30
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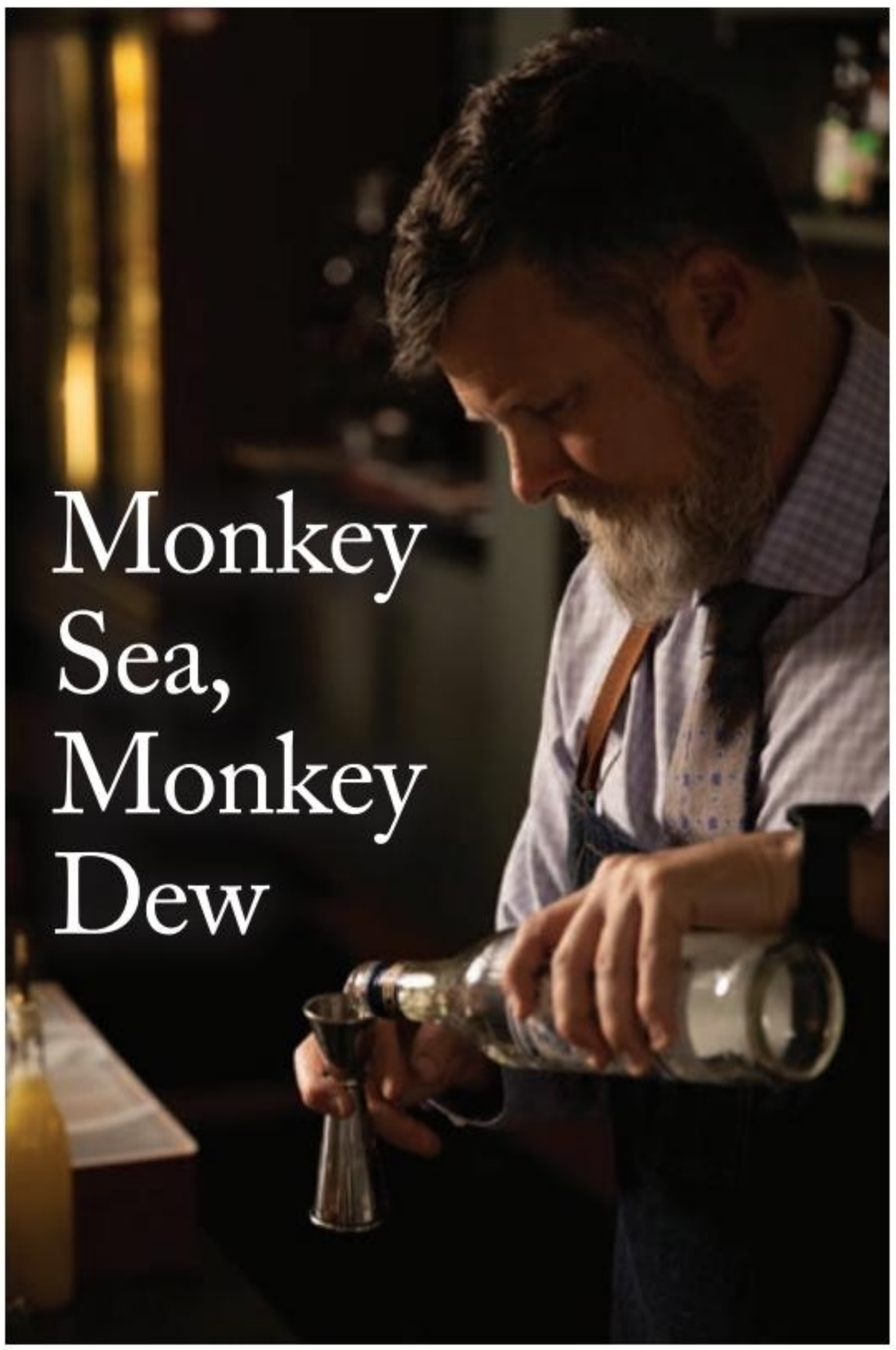


PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW SHERMAN

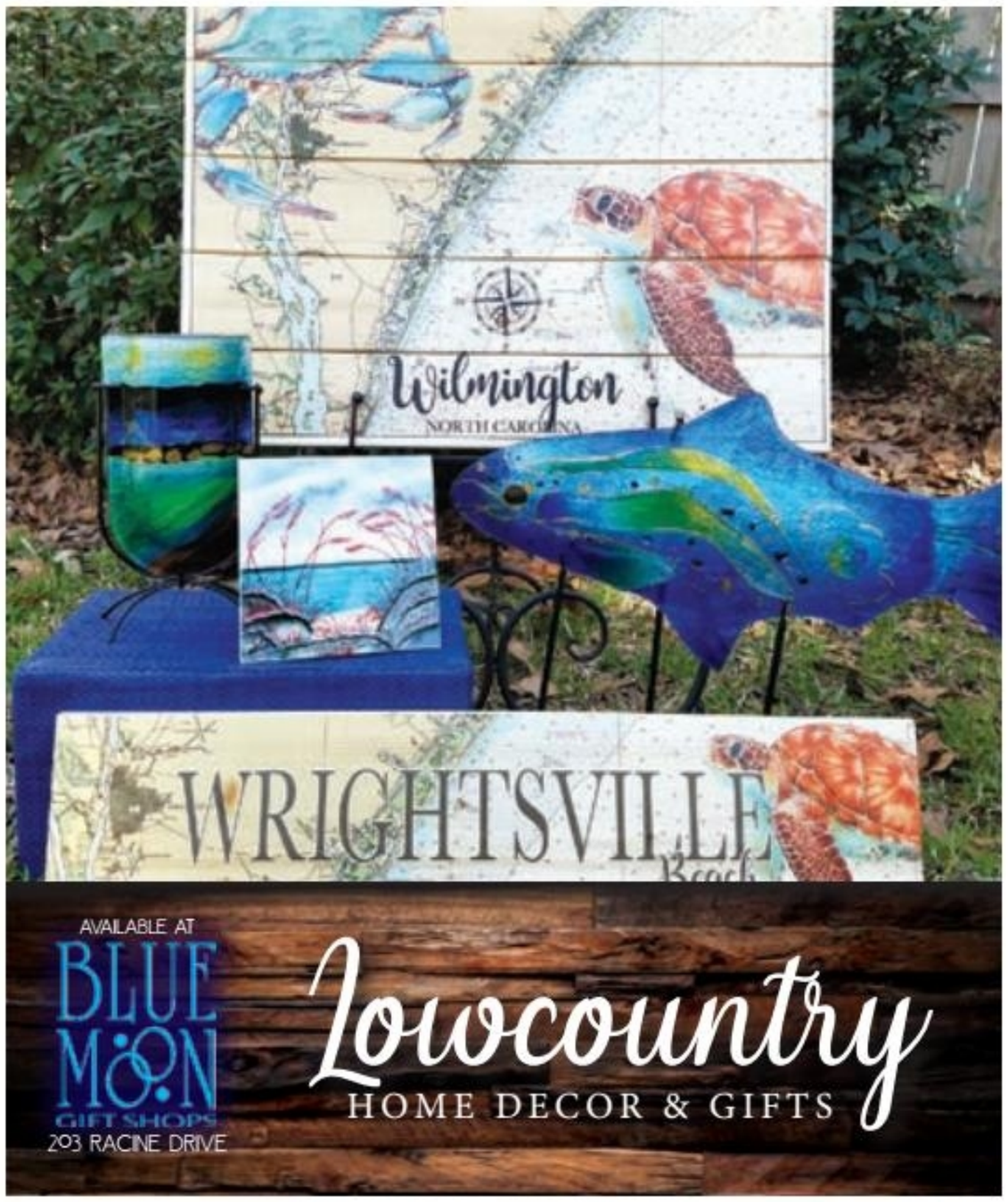
Fred Flynn (above) has been the spirits director and head barman at the acclaimed Wilmington restaurant **manna** since early 2019.

His creation for April is a drink he calls Monkey Sea, Monkey Dew: "I love this cocktail because you can taste each ingredient separately. It's so well-balanced that you get something different with every sip. The other great part of this drink is that it's so delicious it always leaves you wanting more. Enjoy!"

Monkey Sea, Monkey Dew

1 oz Monkey Shoulder Scotch
3/4 oz Averna Siciliano Amaro
3/4 oz Luxardo Cherry liqueur
3/4 oz fresh orange juice
1/4 oz fresh lemon juice
Orange peel

Shake all ingredients vigorously, then double-strain over a big rock into a rocks glass. Garnish with an expressed orange peel.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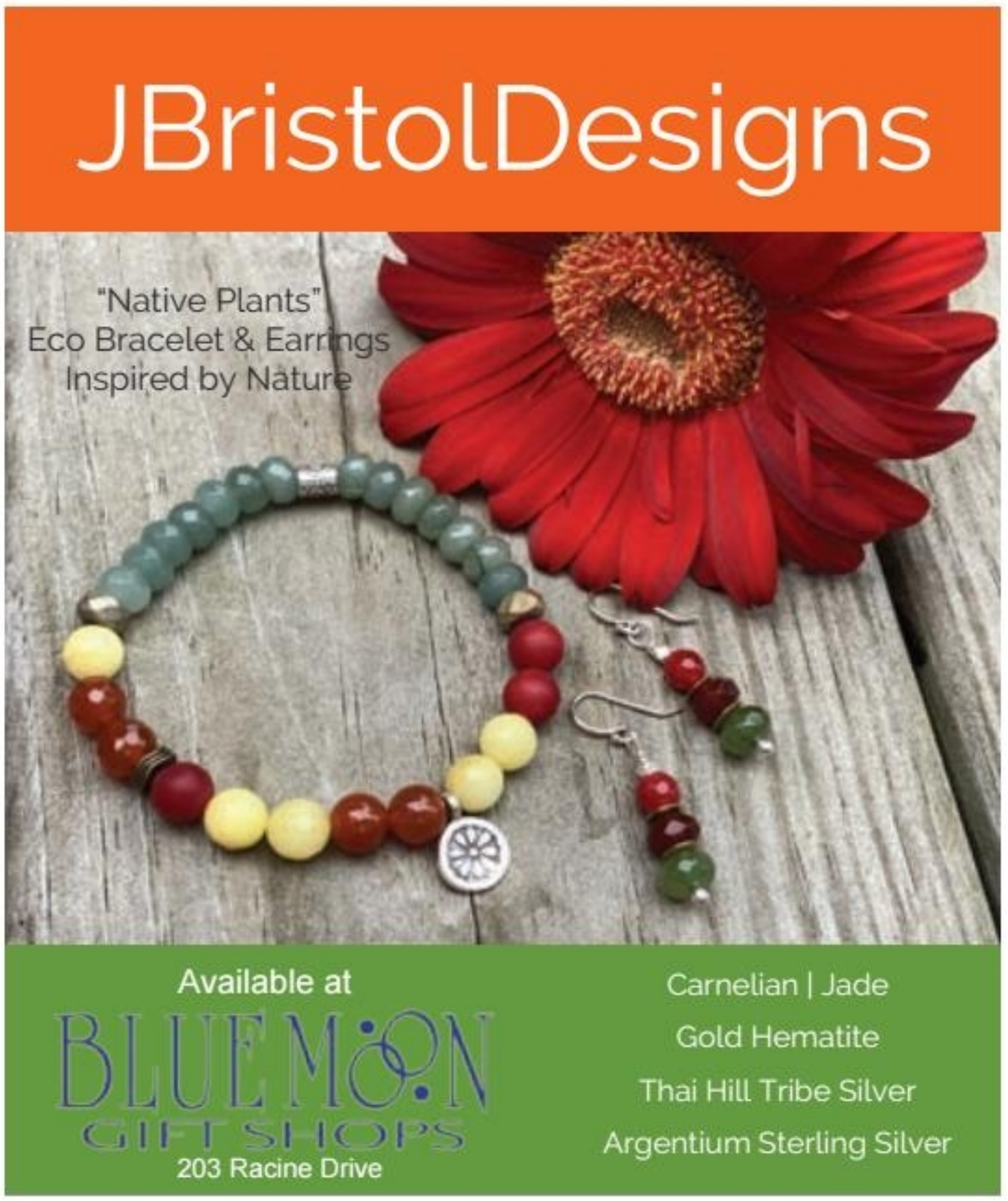
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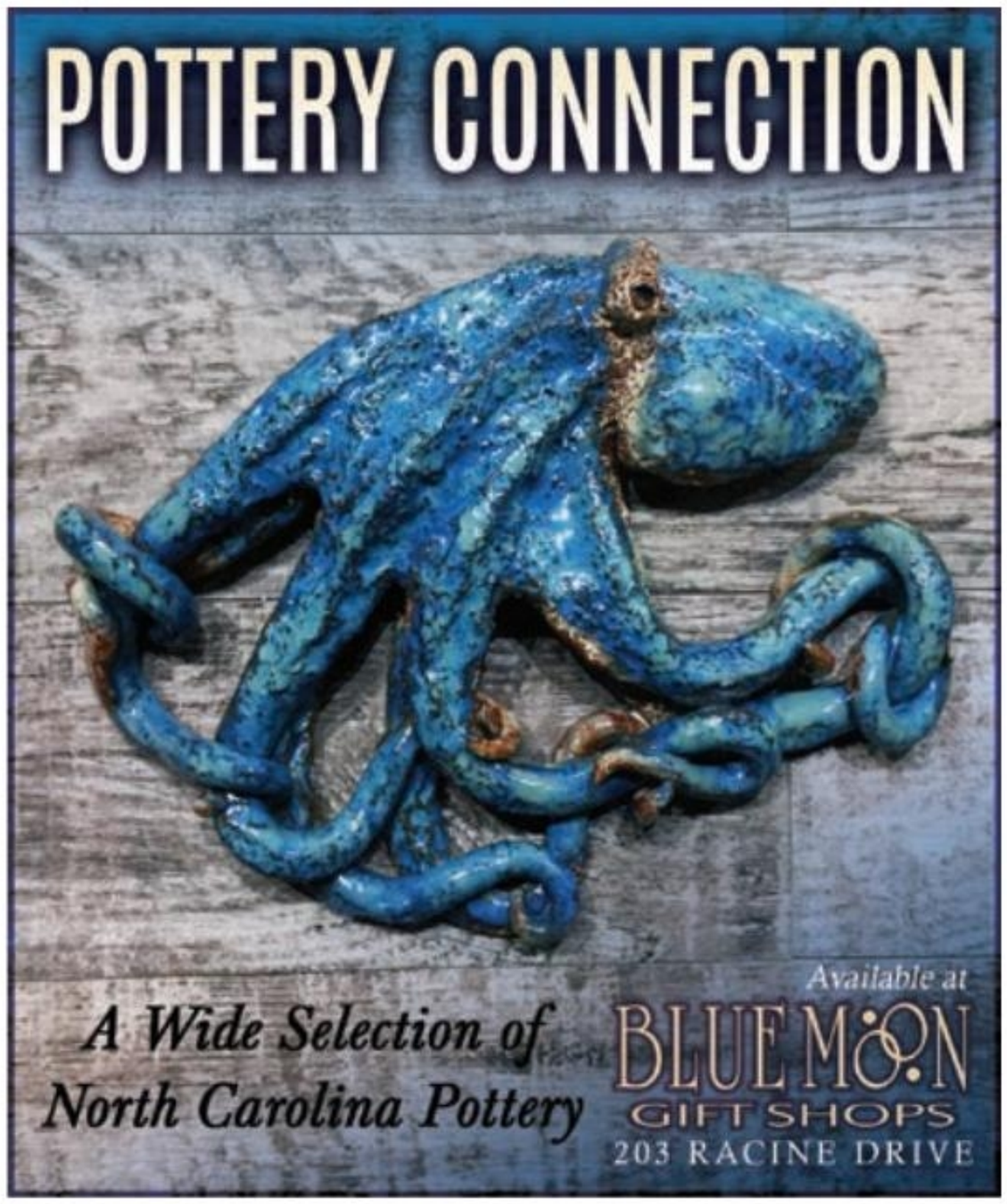

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April

This month's five essential dates

4/15

A lively combination of aerobatics, dance, and theater, all set within the confines of an Art Deco hotel and its visitors, **Cirque Eloize: Hotel** is a unique theatrical experience. Presented by Cape Fear Stage. Tickets: $29-$54. *wilsoncentertickets.com.*

4/20

Jamaican reggae legends **Toots and the Maytals** bring their ska and rocksteady sounds to Greenfield Lake Amphitheater. Tickets: $32-$175. *greenfieldlake amphitheater.com.*

4/21-22

Riverdance celebrates its 25th anniversary with a ground-breaking show — new staging and costumes by the original producers and new soundtrack by Grammy Award-winning composer Bill Whelan. Tickets: $41-$85. *wilsoncentertickets.com*

4/25

Local bluegrass aficionados and musicians gather for the **4th Annual Bluegrass Bash**, an indoor/outdoor evening of performances, local beer and food at Thalian Hall. Tickets: $15-$50. *thalianhall.org.*

4/30

"**The Hands of Liberace**," an evening with celebrated pianist Philip Fortenberry—who performed in HBO's Liberace bio, *Behind the Candelabra*—comes to Thalian Hall. Tickets: $15-$42. *thalianhall.org.*

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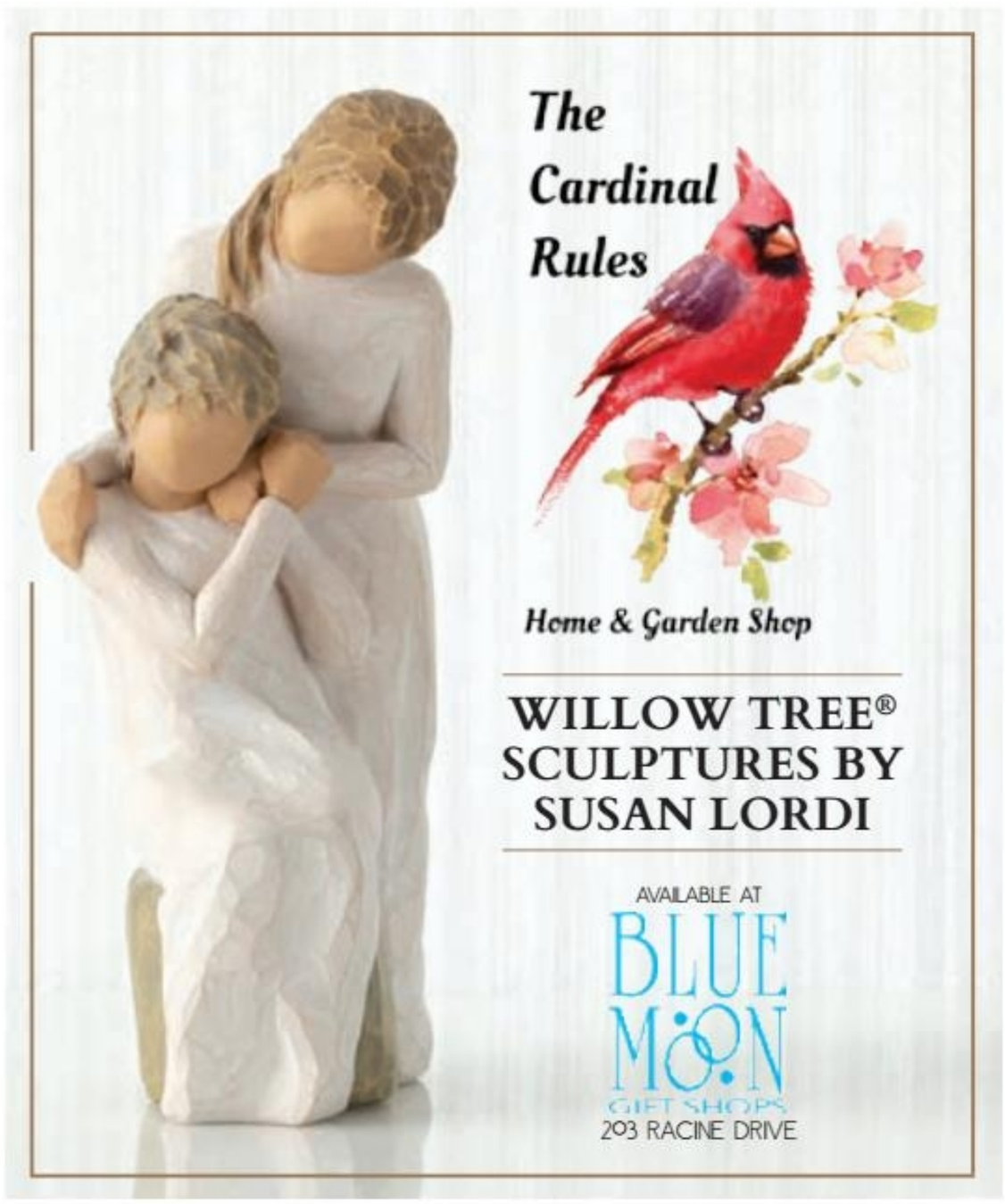
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Mountain Men

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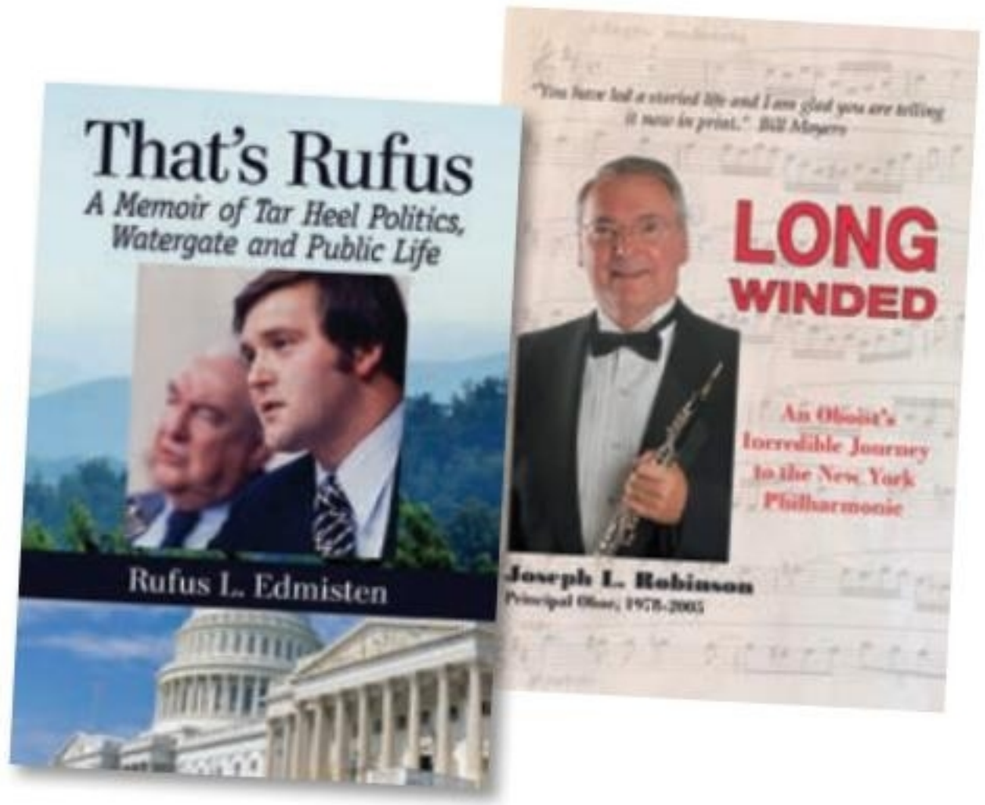
That's Rufus
A Memoir of Tar Heel Politics, Watergate and Public Life
Rufus L. Edmisten
LONG WINDED
An Oboist's Incredible Journey to the New York Philharmonic
Joseph L. Robinson

By D.G. Martin

In 1958-59, two North Carolina mountain boys graduated from local high schools, made their ways to college, and then went on to very different high-profile careers.

Rufus Edmisten moved from Watauga High School in Boone to UNC-Chapel Hill, headed for a career in politics. Joseph Robinson left Lenoir High School for Davidson College on his way to musical performances at the highest level.

Coincidentally, both men recently published memoirs that show how the combination of hard work, high ambition, audacity and luck can lead to success.

Edmisten's *That's Rufus: A Memoir of Tar Heel Politics, Watergate and Public Life* describes how he grew up on a farm near Boone, tending cows and pigs, and working fields of cabbages and tobacco. After Chapel Hill and a round of teaching high school in Washington, Edmisten entered law school at George Washington and secured a low-level job on Sen. Sam Ervin's staff. He soon became one of the senator's full-time trusted assistants in the Watergate-Nixon impeachment matter.

His book's opening pages take readers to July 23, 1973, when he served President Nixon with a demand for Watergate-related records. This key moment ultimately led to Nixon's resignation under the threat of impeachment and was a launch pad for Edmisten's political career.

Edmisten returned to North Carolina in 1974 and mounted a successful campaign for attorney general. His triumph over a host of prominent Democrats gave notice he would run for governor someday.

That day came in 1984, when Gov. Jim Hunt ran for the U.S. Senate, and a host of Democrats lined up to run for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Edmisten won in a brutal primary runoff against former Charlotte Mayor Eddie Knox and then lost the general election to the then-Congressman Jim Martin.

Some believe he lost, in part at least, because he made disparaging remarks about barbecue. His version of that incident is, by itself, worth the price of the book. But Edmisten says it was Ronald Reagan's "sticky coattails" that "swept both me and Jim Hunt away from our dreams. We were not alone, either. The sweep was broad and far reaching."

After the loss, Edmisten felt crestfallen and abandoned. "The ache in the bottom of my stomach was so great nothing appealed to me except finding some dark place to crawl away and hide," he writes. "I swear I saw people cross the street so they wouldn't have to talk to me."

However, he came back from that defeat and won election as secretary of state. How he then lost that position in disgrace and the lessons learned from that sad story make for the most poignant part of the book.

His situation came to a head in 1995. A report by the state auditor and articles in the *Raleigh News & Observer* alleged the misuse of employees and a state car, abuses by subordinates, and improper hiring practices.

In this deluge of criticism, Edmisten announced he would not run for re-election and, he writes, "I actually thanked God my daddy had died before this mess started."

Why did it happen?

In a chapter titled "Hubris," he confesses, "It was nobody's fault but my own."

Edmisten writes that it was the excessive pride that arose from his long years at the center of public attention that led to his troubles. He warns, "Once hubris gets a foothold it grows incrementally and accelerates until it is expanding exponentially, and in leaps and bounds takes over."

This lesson about the dangers of hubris is not the end of the

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story. In inspiring chapters, Edmisten chronicles how his wife and friends led him back into the practice of law and other areas of service. His wife told him, "We are not going to whine."

"At the age of fifty-five," he writes, "I put aside all petty things and began a new life."

In his new life, Edmisten lives in Raleigh practicing law and giving gardening advice on a weekly radio show. He gives us another lesson: It is never too late to turn an old life into a new one.

Robinson's memoir, *Long Winded: An Oboist's Incredible Journey to the New York Philharmonic*, asks: How did a small-town boy who never attended conservatory persuade one of the world's greatest conductors, Zubin Mehta, to give him a chance at one of the world's most coveted positions in the New York Philharmonic, one of the world's greatest orchestras?

Growing up in a small North Carolina town like Lenoir might not seem to be the best background for an aspiring classical musician. But the mountain furniture community had the best high school band in the state. When Robinson was drafted to fill an empty oboe slot, his course was set.

He loved the oboe so much that his Davidson College classmates called him "Oboe Joe." However, Davidson's musical program lacked the professional music training that Robinson craved. Nevertheless, he stayed at Davidson, majoring in English, economics and the liberal arts. His focus on writing and expression gave him tools to win a music position at the highest level.

His success at Davidson led to a Fulbright grant to study in Europe and the opportunity to meet Marcel Tabuteau, who, Robinson says, was the greatest player and oboe pedagogue of the 20th century. When Tabuteau learned that Robinson was an English major and a good writer who could help write his book on oboe theory, he agreed to give him oboe instruction. Those five weeks with Tabuteau, Robinson says, "more than compensated for the conservatory training I did not receive."

Years later, however, after moving through a series of journeyman teaching and performing positions at the Atlanta Symphony, the

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North Carolina School of the Arts, and the University of Maryland, Robinson still had not achieved his aspiration to land a first oboe chair in a major orchestra, but he did not give up.

When Harold Gomberg, the acclaimed lead oboe of the New York Philharmonic, retired, Robinson audaciously applied. When finally granted an audition, he prepared endlessly. He was ready for the hour and 20 minutes of paces the audition committee demanded. Afterward, he was confident that he had done very well.

But the Philharmonic's personnel manager, James Chambers, after saying how well the audition went, reported that music director Zubin Mehta judged Robinson's tone "too strong" for the Philharmonic. Robinson was not to be one of the two players who were finalists.

That should have been the end of it, but Robinson writes, "I knew that winning a once-in-a lifetime position like principal oboe of the New York Philharmonic was like winning the lottery."

At 3 a.m. the next morning, using all his liberal arts writing and persuasive talents, he wrote Chambers explaining why his tone might have seemed too strong and, "You will not make a mistake by choosing Eric or Joe, but you might by excluding me if tone is really the issue."

When Chambers read the letter to Mehta, they agreed that it could not have been "more persuasive or fortuitous." Chambers reported that Mehta said, "If you believe in yourself that much, he will hear you again."

Robinson's final audition was successful. His "winning lottery ticket," he writes, "had Davidson College written all over it."

From 1978 until his retirement in 2005, he served as principle oboe for the New York Philharmonic. Living in Chapel Hill, he can still bring an audience to tears when he plays the beloved solo "Gabriel's Oboe."

D.G. Martin hosts North Carolina Bookwatch *Sunday at 3:30 p.m. and Tuesday at 5 p.m. on UNC-TV. The program also airs on the North Carolina Channel Tuesday at 8:00 p.m. and other times. To view prior programs: http://video.unctv.org/show/nc-bookwatch/episodes/*

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Word Power

With students from 43 different countries, the Cape Fear Literacy Council makes learning to read fundamental

By Dana Sachs

Yasmin Tomkinson:

Executive Director,
Cape Fear Literacy Council

Can you describe the negative effects of illiteracy and low literacy in our society?

Illiteracy is called a "silent crisis" because it's an underlying issue for so many other problems. There's a direct correlation with incarceration. There's a huge correlation with drug and alcohol abuse. Underemployment. Unemployment. High medical expenses, because if you're not doing research on health issues and doing preventive things, you end up going to the ER instead of to a regular doctor. It becomes an emergency.

What does the Cape Fear Literacy Council do to address these issues?

We help adults by providing instruction in three categories: Adult Literacy, English as a Second Language, and Digital Literacy. It's very personalized in order to help our students reach their particular goals.

What makes your program successful?

The magic of what we do is that we train volunteers to serve as either one-on-one tutors or very small class teachers. I started out here as a tutor myself, and my first student wanted to get a certain kind of job, so we did test-taking strategies with him. My second student was much older, and he was a beginning reader. He wanted to be able to read the Bible and write checks, so we focused in on those things. We train our volunteers to be very student-centered.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, about 20 percent of people in this country are classified as either illiterate or exhibiting "low literacy." How does your program address their particular needs?

The vast majority of our literacy students fall into the category that they can read some, they can understand certain things, but they don't feel confident and comfortable in their skills. Comparing prices or even reading tables of information — those kinds of multi-step skills — are much harder for them. Factor in those who don't really use computers. I'm a technophobe, but I can do my research online. I can figure out, "Am I going to buy this washing machine or that washing machine?" And that's an easy one to think about. It's much more complicated when you're thinking of, say, medical information. If you had to find a liver specialist, how would you do that? Or schools. What school are you going to send your child to? Those things have much higher stakes and can be more complex.

How do your students describe their challenges with reading?

Most folks who come in know that they are struggling to read, but many don't know what they don't know, which is the hard part. And it goes by generation. People in their mid-40s and above probably struggle with "phonemic awareness" — understanding

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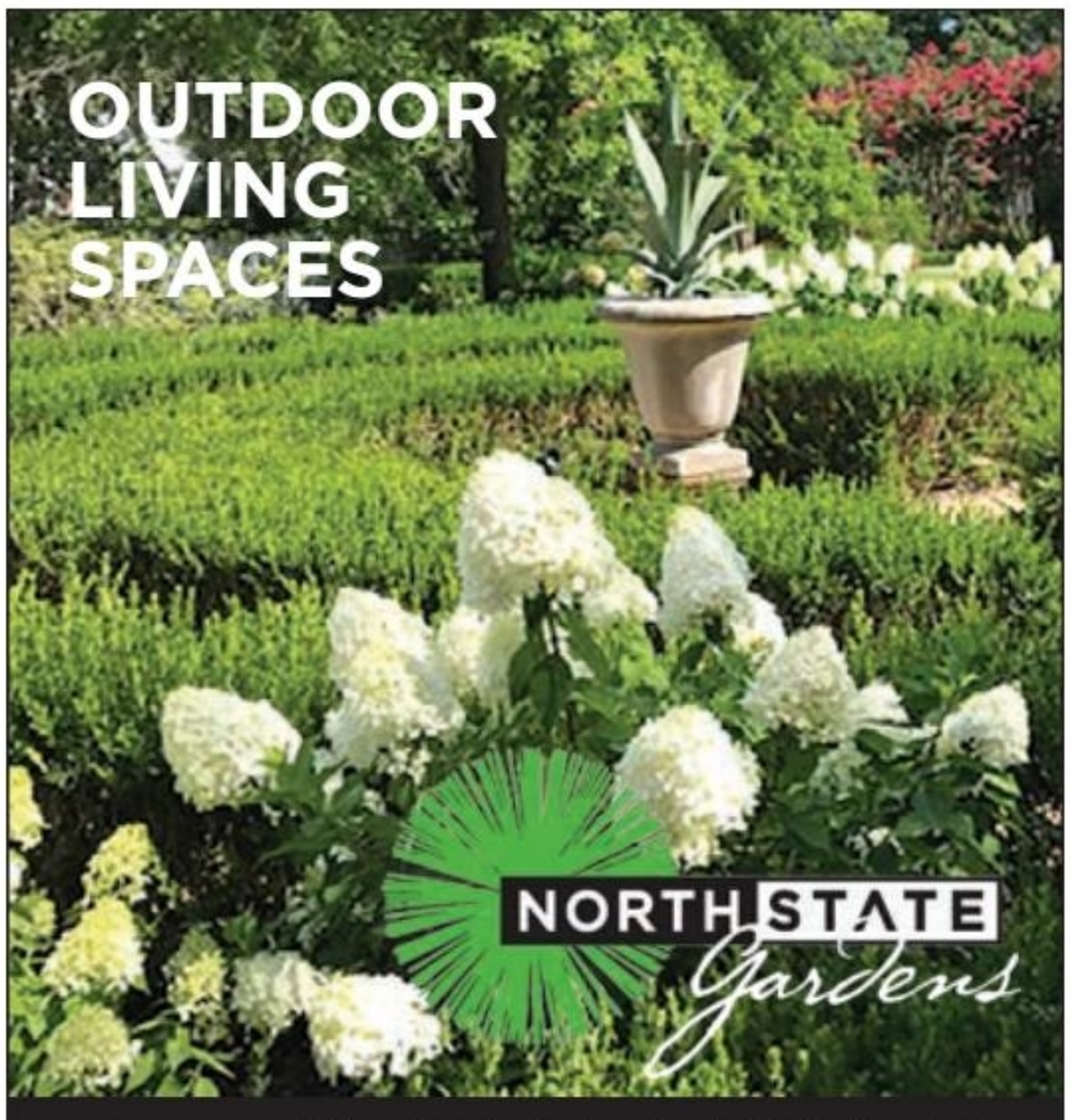

how to decode words and associating sounds with letters.

Why is that a problem for people of that age group?

There was a Whole Language Movement in education theory. It was a movement away from teaching phonics instruction explicitly. Instead, they looked at the whole word — that's what "Whole Language" is about — instead of teaching word parts. We believe you need both. You absolutely need phonics to make sense of new and different kinds of words. If you have a learning disability that was not diagnosed, phonics is the hardest thing to do. And it's the foundation of everything. Many of our older students didn't have a diagnosis or, if they did have a diagnosis, they didn't get the help they needed.

What kinds of strategies do people use to function in our society if they can't read?

Their coping skills show remarkable intelligence. We had a long-distance truck driver. He said, "I'm good on highways because there's a number system and I've got a good sense of direction, but when I get into a city, it's really hard." When he was in Philadelphia, he said, "I just called a cab and told the cab the address and I followed the cab to the place." How smart is that? But the problem was that the cab left. He had to wait to unload. And leaving was not the same as coming in. And so then he got really turned around, in a city, with a giant truck.

We had a woman whose employers wanted to promote her to assistant manager. Because she knew that that meant she had to do paperwork, instead of saying anything to anybody, she quit her job. It was so tragic. Obviously, she was very good at what she did, and they were trying to reward her. It turned into a panic for her.

She was ashamed?

Yeah. She couldn't tell them that she didn't know how to read and write, so she just quit because she didn't want to face that.

Are these the kinds of experiences that convince people to go to the Literacy Council?

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So many people have said that even though it's something they've struggled with their whole lives, coming here is a very hard step. We had a young woman who said she sat in our parking lot and cried in her car on three separate occasions before she could get the courage to come inside. I think what happens when they come here is they are treated with respect, treated as individuals. We want to know each person's story. I think they come to see, and we try to show them,"It's not your fault. There are hundreds of people here, and *thousands* of people in this community, that could use our help."

Your tutoring program must bring together a wide range of people.

Last year our ESL program had students from 43 different countries speaking 17 different languages. This is a place where everybody is welcome. I have heard stories where, say, it's a black student having a white tutor, and both of them are reflecting back: "I have never had a black person in my life that I could speak honestly with." Or, "I've never had a white person that I really trusted." The one-on-one tutoring is really powerful.

Did you feel that yourself as a tutor?

I've thought a lot about my first student. There's nobody else in the world I would spend twice a week with — an hour-and-a-half at a time! — and in a very focused way. Even my best friends I didn't spent that kind of time with. You really get to know each other. I mentored him, and he mentored me.

How did he mentor you?

I would not be married to my husband if it weren't for him. After I went on our first date, I came back and said to my student, "That guy wouldn't shut up. He talked the whole night!" And my student said, "Oh, guys get nervous. Just give him one more chance. Please?"

I said, "Only because you said so, I'll do it."

Dana Sachs' latest novel, The Secret of the Nightingale Palace, *is available at bookstores, online and throughout Wilmington.*

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Man of the Earth

According to acclaimed plantsman Tony Avent, the universe has plans for you – and your garden

By Wiley Cash · Photographs by Mallory Cash

For someone who has spent much of his life hunched over the earth, his fingers threading through soil, rocks and roots, Triangle plantsman and nursery proprietor Tony Avent spends an awful lot of time talking about invisible energy and the unseen hand of the universe. Listen closely and you will hear him say things like: *The universe has plans for you, and you can't fight them; The plants tell me where they want to go; and The energy of the world speaks to us all.*

This kind of talk may sound hokey until you visit Avent's Juniper Level Garden in Raleigh, a place so magical and mysterious that it is not hard to believe that a divine force once struck this ground and caused all manner of flora and fauna to spring forth. But, in reality, that is not what happened. The truth is less supernatural and much more natural. Avent's 28-acre garden was once a sprawling tobacco field, and when he set out to tame this land 30 years ago he did so with nothing but a shovel and a suspicion that something otherworldly could happen here. He was right.

Avent's Juniper Level Garden and the on-site Plant Delights Nursery, where the garden's specimens are grown and propagated, have become the nation's standard bearer for garden horticulture. Avent has forged a career as a well-known and charismatic spokesperson for a movement dedicated to growing and developing gardens instead of simply planting them. His formal career began after graduating from NC State University with a degree in horticultural science before working his way toward the position of landscape director at the North Carolina Fairgrounds. Soon, he found himself on plant expeditions across the United States and in countries like South Africa, Mexico, China, Croatia, and Thailand. Along the way, he has given nearly 1,000 lectures, published dozens and dozens of articles, been featured in national media, and appeared on television alongside Martha Stewart on channels like HGTV and NBC.

With all that travel and so much glitz and glamour, what has kept Avent's hands dirtied by his native soil in Raleigh? Perhaps it is the fact that the region's climate and geography are so amenable to his work.

"This garden can grow the best diversity of plants anywhere in the country outside the Pacific Northwest," Avent says. He is standing on a

pathway in the middle of the garden on an early afternoon in February. Spring may be a few weeks away, but the garden feels surprisingly dramatic and alive. "We designed the garden so that something is always blooming, always green, always living," he says. "The garden is always in transition. It's always changing."

The we he mentions refers to himself and Michelle, his first wife and high school sweetheart, who passed away in 2012 after a long battle with cancer. The two of them had known one another since they were children, and their families had been in the area for centuries. As a matter of fact, one of Avent's ancestors began operating the ferry that crossed the Cape Fear River in 1775, thus the name of Raleigh's Avent Ferry Road. Avent and his late wife purchased the house that is now used for the garden's offices in 1988, along with 2 acres of surrounding land. They had hoped for peace and tranquillity, but that was not quite what they found.

"When we first moved here, nobody in this part of the county knew what a muffler was," Avent says. To counteract the noise from the road in front of their home, Avent spent his evenings after dinner digging out a place for a huge grotto with a waterfall, an area of the garden so elegant and alive with plant life that it appears to have been here forever. The sound of falling water does not just shut out the noise of traffic; it shuts out the noise of the world. Perhaps that makes it easier for Avent to listen to what the universe is telling him.

Michelle's death had him reeling, but, according to Avent, "sometimes the universe has other plans." His late wife had urged him to remarry after her passing, so nearly two years after her death, Avent found his way to online dating, where he eventually began chatting with a local woman. She turned out to be much more local than he could have ever imagined. He and his current wife, Anita, have known one another since they were in Sunday school as children. Her grandfather worked a farm only a few miles away from Avent's garden enterprise. Even their parents had known each other for decades.

It is also the tutelage, tragic death, and legacy of Avent's mentor J.C. Raulston that keep him tied to this place. Raulston was an acclaimed horticulturist and the first director of the North Carolina Arboreteum. Avent was one of Raulston's students at NC State, and he studied Raulston and his work closely.

"Working with him was the first time I had somebody who thought like I did," he says. Avent designed Juniper Level Gardens as an homage to Raulston's arboretum, and the two gardens seem to be in conversation with one another. Although Raulston perished in an automobile accident in 1996, to Avent, he never seems out of reach. "I can feel his energy in his garden at the arboretum," Avent says. "And I can feel it here. It made sense for me to stay here."

The roots of this world traveler and plant adventurer run too deep to be moved, or transplanted.

None of this really seems to surprise Avent. He possessed a passion for plants from a very early age, and his life's first major disappointment set him on a course that would find him nurturing a single plot of land into something steady and permanent.

Avent was fascinated with plants and greenhouses as a young child, and in his early teens, he begged his father to take him to visit what he

believed was the premiere garden in the world: Wayside Gardens in Greenwood, South Carolina. He was certain of the garden's beauty because he had been receiving their mail-order catalog and would spend hours studying it. But when he and his father arrived after their journey south, Avent found nothing but a brick warehouse to which plants were shipped and from where they would be shipped again once they were sold.

"I was so devastated," he says, "and I remember thinking, *When I grow up I will build a place that no one is ever disappointed in when they come visit.*"

With the recent announcement that Avent and his wife have gifted Juniper Level Gardens to NC State University, Avent has assured that not only will people never be disappointed in his garden, he has assured that they will be able to visit it in perpetuity, a plan that perhaps the universe saw coming. That is important to Avent because he wants the energy of this place to be felt by others.

"I get energy from everything out here," he says. "I never wear gloves, and now it has been discovered that the electrical energy in the soil is touching you, you're feeling it. This energy can't be created, and it can't be destroyed. It's always going to be here."

No matter where he goes, the universe has decided that Tony Avent will always be here too.

Wiley Cash lives in Wilmington with his wife and their two daughters. His latest novel, The Last Ballad, *is available wherever books are sold.*

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Salty Splendor

In praise of our glorious coastal life

By Mark Holmberg

My wanderings and research have led me to the conclusion that North Carolina is the nation's saltiest state (I want that license plate!) and one of the tip-top marine life producers in the world. Yes, our oceanfront coastline stretches just 322 miles — a short walk compared with the shorelines of Alaska and California. But we have all to ourselves vast systems of estuaries (where freshwater and the ocean mingle), including the titanic Pamlico Sound. It is second in size only to the Chesapeake Bay, which is shared by six states and D.C.

Add it all up and there are more than 12,300 miles of salty splendor here in the Red Drum/Channel Bass state. And so much of it is knee-deep to an egret, accessible to only the saltiest boaters and kayakers, but is a perfectly briny and absolutely blooming habitat for the tiny plants and animals that are the very foundation of all life on our planet.

Everything begins here! Everything lives here!

And, oh, the mysteries of it all! Among the deepest and trickiest: the way the tides move and shape life here. The only constant is that everything changes.

We've walked to Bald Head Island from Fort Fisher. It's no longer surrounded by water, thanks to tides and storms. We've strolled Wrightsville Beach's entire 4-mile waterfront on a sandbar exposed by a crazy low tide.

Fisherfolk talk of the best fishing right before and after tide changes, or during rising tides. It all depends on who's talking, which way the wind is blowing and the current beer count. (I prefer a slack or falling tide for surf-casting because I can use a smaller, more sensitive weight.) Low tides are a favorite time for surfers (unless the waves are big), rakers, diggers, beach drivers and most shellers, although some beachcombers swear high tides are the best for treasure hunting in some spots.

Quick story: After a low-tide winter surf on the top end of Wrightsville in 2014, I ran into a lightly clad youngster with a nice bucket of fresh quahog (hard) and cherrystone clams he had raked out of the marsh on the leeward side of Shell Island, which is not so shelly anymore. His freckled face was flushed from his cold morning of clamming. He had some nice ones, for sure. "Do you want some?" he asked. "I'll trade you some clams for some fishhooks."

Turns out, he was living out of his faded car and camping out. "Living off the land," as he said. (He reminded me of my younger self during my hitchhiking years.) Keep your clams, I said, respecting the effort it took to find them on this cold day and thinking he really could live off the land. My tackle backpack yielded a flounder rig, several hooks, a new rubber worm and some still-fresh leftover bait shrimp. Even if I live another half-century, I doubt someone will ever again offer to trade fresh clams for fishhooks.

Savvy boaters will also tell you low tide is the time to learn the shifty channels that meander through these huge estuarine systems, such as the shortcuts to Cape Lookout, Bear Island, Masonboro and all the other beaches. If you can bump through a spot at dead low tide, you're

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pretty safe the rest of the time—as long as the channel doesn't move.

But assume nothing!

That's the one thing I've learned during the past year-and-a-half of living in and rehabbing a fishing shack on Queens Creek (some older maps say Queen Creek), a sizable estuary feeding the Intracoastal Waterway a short mile from the ocean.

Every sunrise and sunset I look at what's going on at the water's edge, to check for footprints in the sand or who's swimming, fishing or flying nearby. Otters, raccoons, possums, deer, dolphins, alligators, eagles, osprey, ducks, geese, herons, egrets, pelicans, those crazy cormorants, jumping mullets . . . you name it, we've got it.

And even though I constantly check my tide clock and have studied the basics of our semidiurnal tides (two complete sets of highs and lows a day, six hours and 15 minutes apart with the sea level shifting two to four feet), I am continually surprised by what the water is doing. Just when I think I've got the rhythm, it changes.

Yes, it's moon phases. The sun and planets can have their influence. Westerly winds push the tides down, easterly winds whip them up. So-called spring tides happen year-round and neap tides turn down the volume like smooth jazz.

The highest tide of the year has a royal name — king tide — but where's the cool name for the lowest tide? (May I suggest "serf tide"?) Those are the ones that turn much of coastal Carolina into a scary lunar landscape, like a leak has sprung in the ocean floor.

Seeking to plumb the depths of the mysterious tides, I stopped in at the Clyde Phillips Seafood Market on the coastal highway (Route 24) in waterfront Swansboro on a recent cold March morning. Four generations of this family have run shrimpers and other fishing boats out of this spot.

The beautiful 79-foot Capt. Phillips shrimp boat (built on Holden Beach Island) berths here just a few yards from the four-lane, and has to be one of the most photographed and/or painted boats in the art world. This clan knows the shoals, channels, rivers, the ocean and the tides up and down this coast.

I found two Clyde Phillipses (the younger is 55) sitting by a gas heater with their brainy

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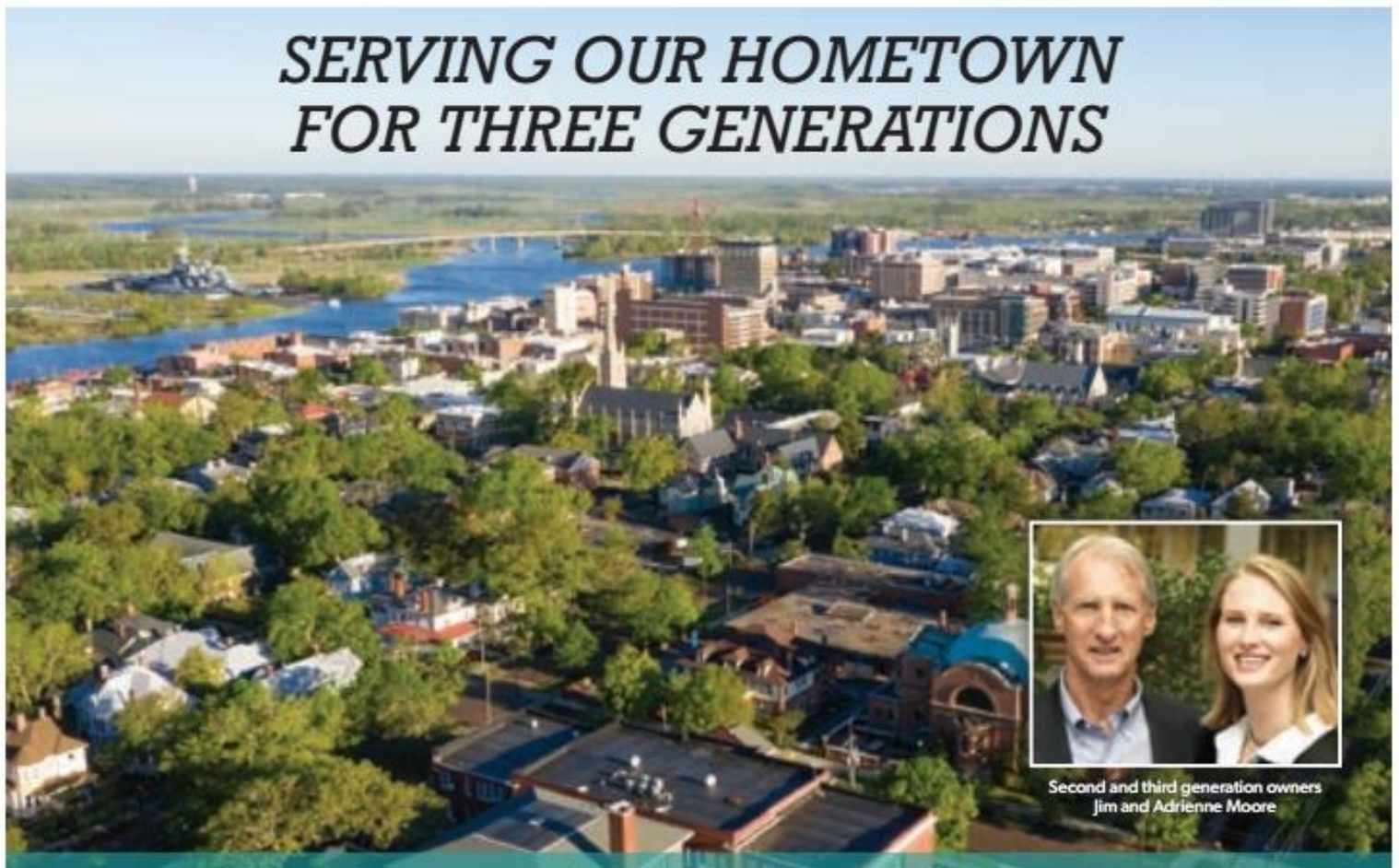

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LETTER FROM THE COAST

friend, Dr. Mike, a retired Navy pathologist. They warmed to the subject of tides, sharing some of their fishing and shrimping secrets and the amazing vagaries of big-time workboat life in coastal Carolina. Surprisingly, they said the shrimping is better now than when the Phillips patriarch began in the 1950s. More net-ripping sharks, too. The 55-year-old Clyde Phillips, who was still nursing from a bottle when his workboat life began, described bottleneck areas where the tide can swirl in and out at the same time and warned that the tides can push the upper water one way while deeper currents surge the other way, and vice versa.

In their lifetimes, they have seen tremendous changes to coastal Carolina's estuaries and the channels — the roads — through them. When your boat drafts 8 feet and weighs close to 100 tons, you'd better know your water and when to be in it. It appears that after a lifetime of commercial fishing, the rhythm and mysteries of the tides kind of clear up and soak into your bones.

"I know it," the younger Clyde Phillips said. "I don't think about it." That's pretty salty.

UPDATE from my last Letter from the Coast, in which I wrote about finding a basketball-size whale vertebrae while walking through the low-tide shallows on Bear Island last October: A visiting friend (an expert sheller) suggested the whalebone should be in a museum. So we took it to Hammocks Beach State Park, which has a sweet nature center. Once there, park ranger Renee Evans immediately informed us it was illegal for us to have it without permission from the feds due to the Marine Mammal Protection Act. She was delighted to accept our donation and said it will be preserved with a special coating, and will make a grand addition to their displays and nature classes. (An expert later identified it as the caudal — tail — vertebrae of a right, fin or humpback whale.)

Next on my shelling list: a chest full of pieces of eight. If I find them, you can bet I won't be blabbing about it.

Mark Holmberg was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2003. He has been writing for Salt since 2013, most recently under the guise of Spencer Compton, First Earl of Wilmington. He lives in Swansboro.

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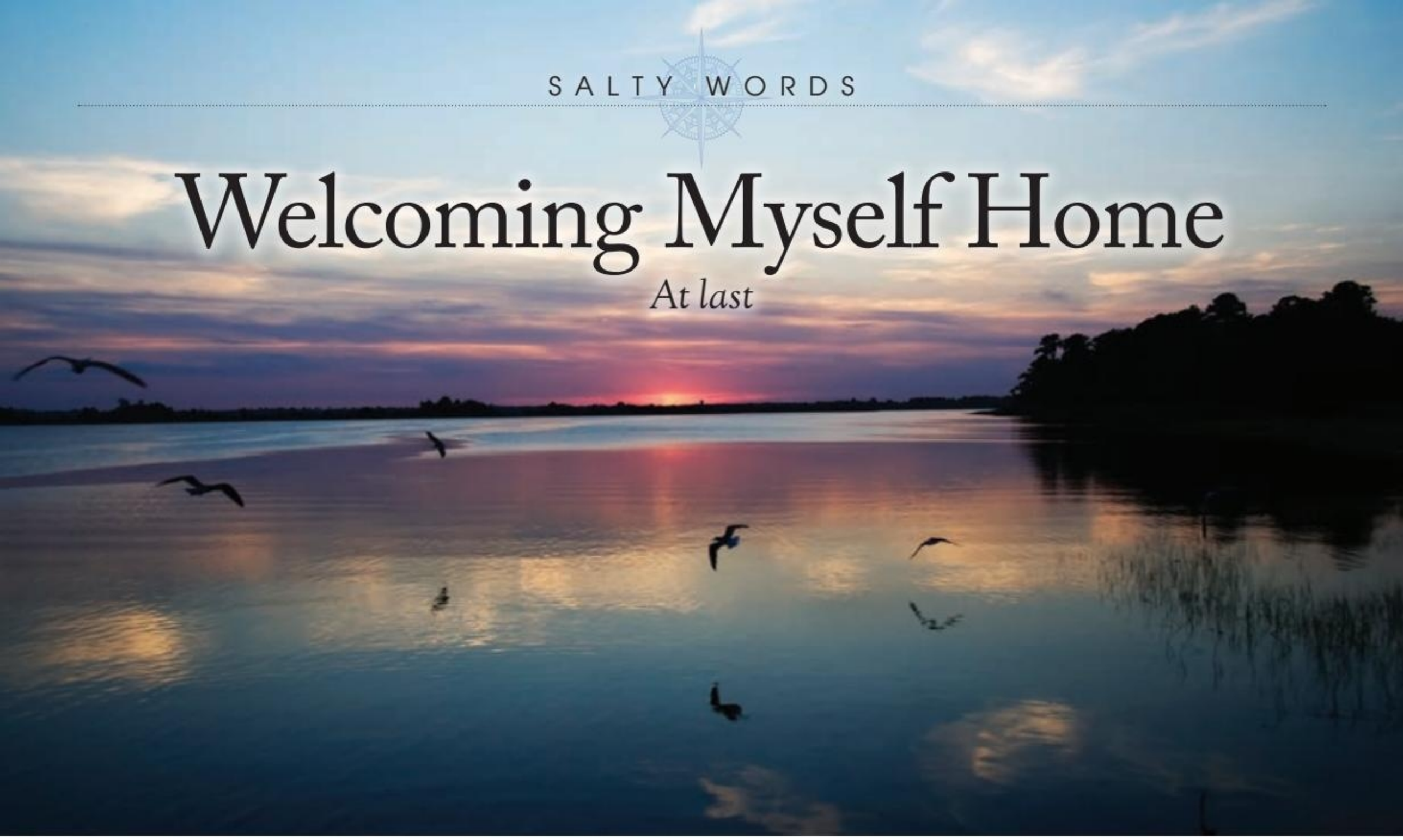
Welcoming Myself Home

At last



By Russell Worth Parker

I was born and raised in Georgia, and if man was born of dust, I am surely made of red clay. My people's bones rest in that iron-rich soil; decades of granite testimony spread across small church graveyards and a hilltop clearing walled by magnolia and pine and kudzu. Over generations, we've expanded outward from our familial center, and hence my ashes will be cast upon the salt farther south. I will drift, clouding the water for a moment, then settle; as much a part of the marsh and mud as it has been of me since I first smelled salt on the wind rolling across green miles of swaying spartina and shifting tide.

Carson McCullers said, "We are homesick most for the places we have never known." I suspect that is the truth that drove me from the home I knew when I was 17 years old, and for 30 years now, I've been trying to find my way back. In that journey, I've been blessed to feel Alpine breezes so cold my lungs ached. I've watched the sunlight spread across the waking Great Barrier Reef from beneath the surface of the Coral Sea, and been surprised by a blue whale silently slipping within 20 feet of me before I realized I was a few fin kicks and many orders of insignificance from a curious Leviathan.

I've anxiously guided parachutes into the waiting desert, steering long, lazy "S-turns" through the night sky, and then landed amongst giant saguaro cactus and petrified wood that still bears its grain thousands of years after it fell. I've experienced the best of humanity when I needed it most and its worst in places Lonely Planet doesn't go. But in all that time, it's always been the rippling marsh, the mud holding millions of years of our collective experience reduced to its most elemental, and the insistence of the rising and falling tide that called to me.

Colored by the sum of all of that, July 10, 2019, was a day of epiphany.

We left our rental house in Arlington, Virginia, for the last time that morning, bound for our home in Wilmington, itself rented as we've been gone this last three years. It's a drive I've made a number of times since we left the Port City in 2016. As always, the knot in my shoulders began to ease at Roanoke Rapids, growing ever looser as I left the highway to pass through Goldsboro, then farther southward to I-40.

That last hour on the highway is always a relaxing time, a heady mix of anticipation and reflection. But as I left the highway at Exit 420 and pulled onto 117 toward Gordon Road, it struck me that this moment was starkly different from those preceding. For the first time since I was 17, I was arriving somewhere with no intention of departing.

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SALTY WORDS

There is no sundown on this assignment. We are in Wilmington not just because the Marine Corps told us to be, but because we want to be. We are here because it is home. It's a feeling grown unfamiliar over three decades, but it's one I like very much.

Georgia will always be where I am from and where I will ultimately go; the bookends of my life. But in between those bookends are the lessons and experiences that have truly taken me home. It's a span of time that seems to have passed in a blur of states and countries, schools and jobs, and now I feel suddenly snapped into the present as if I had long been lost in thought, suddenly realizing we've arrived at a place for which we set out so long ago.

I don't know if Thomas Wolfe was right or not. Maybe we can't go home again. Maybe home is really just a moment frozen by our subconscious; a snapshot we select according to the thing we need to most believe about who we are and where we come from. But if home is ultimately transient and mutable, defined by the people and senses that matter most to us, then we can define where home is at any moment. And in that, we can come home whenever we want.

Home.

It's the place where our daughter, Annabelle, a precocious, lively child who is affirmatively a "Carolina Girl" at age 8, is already set on veterinary school at NC State. It's the place where Katy, my wife and ballast, has built a state-wide reputation for her work and her fundamental decency.

Home is people whose accents rest lyrically in my ears, and where "comfort food" is just food, a fact that reflects that comfort is part and parcel of home. Home is where I can walk to the water's edge in the morning as a bulwark against whatever may come in the hours of the day that follows. Home is where the osprey screaming over Howe Creek still thrills my heart, and the bellowing of the frogs in our pond and the buzzing of insects in our trees are so loud that I have to raise my voice to tell Katy just how good it is to finally be here.

Russell Worth Parker lives and writes in Wilmington. He is proud to be Annabelle's dad and Katy's husband.

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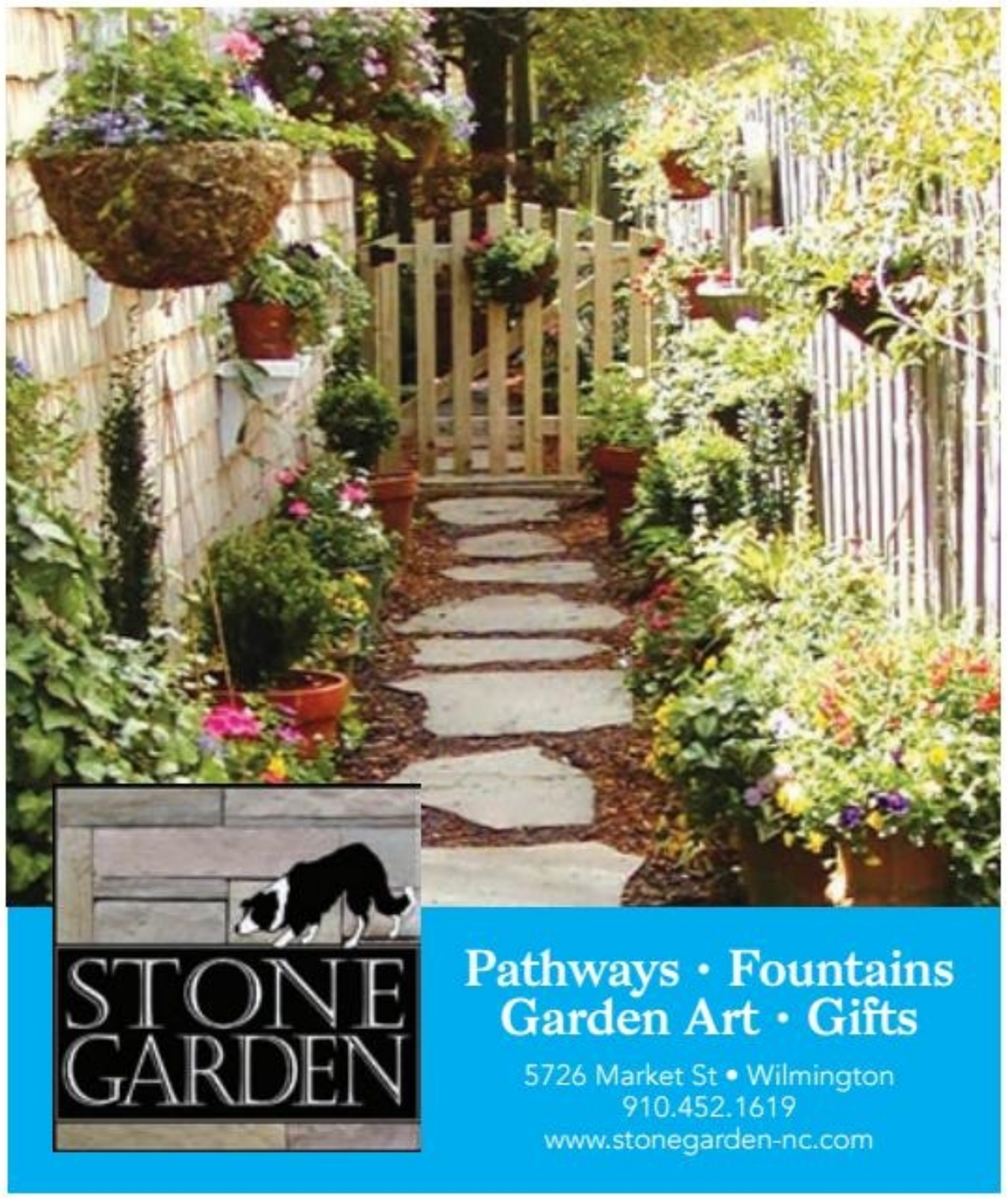

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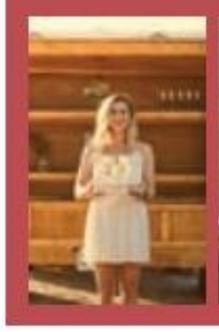

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Green Heron

The patient hunter at water's edge

By Susan Campbell

Think of a heron and a tall, lanky wader comes to mind. However, the green heron is a quite different animal. This stocky bird is about the size of a crow with relatively short yellow legs. But it does have a dark, dagger-like bill and a handsome, velvety-green back, dark cap and chestnut-colored body. And in true heron form, it moves slowly and deliberately, hunting in and around the water's edge.

Because of this slow-motion lifestyle, this bird is often overlooked. It may only be when it flushes from thick vegetation or croaks to advertise its territory that the green heron gets noticed.

Although not an inhabitant of saltwater, green herons are found throughout the coastal plain. These birds can turn up along estuaries, marshes, rivers and smaller bodies of water. Not surprisingly, they feed on fish, amphibians, and large invertebrates. And they have even been known to grab hummingbirds from time to time.

Very versatile hunters, they can dive and swim after prey if motivated. Moving through deep water is likely made possible by their natural buoyancy and the partial webbing between their toes. Most remarkably, green herons are one of a very few bird species that actually use tools. Individuals have been known to use worms, twigs, feathers, bread crusts and more to lure small fish within easy reach.

Green herons are adaptable when it comes to breeding as well. A tight, seasonal pair bond is formed between males and females each year. The male will choose a location and begin nest-building early on. The female will take over and construct a platform of sticks that may be solid, or it may be quite flimsy. But the nest will always be protected, whether it is in a tree or large shrub.

A clutch of three to five eggs will be protected and incubated by both parents. Likewise, the young will be fed and brooded by the male and female. And it will be a month or more that the herons will remain together as a family as the juveniles learn what it takes to survive.

Here in the Wilmington area, we may have a few green herons year-round. However, most members of the population in the eastern U.S. head to the Caribbean or Central America each fall. Even before this southward movement, individuals may wander in any direction, especially if food levels drop or water sources dry up. Individuals have covered very long distances: Surprisingly, a few have been observed as far away as Great Britain and France.

While green herons are with us in the coming weeks, if you scan the edges of wet habitat, you may spot one — hunched, with a long, sharp bill staring intently into the water. Better yet, listen for a loud, catlike "*skeow*" or odd screaming that may give its presence away. Should a green heron fly, it may seem somewhat crow-like with slow wing beats; however, its partially unfolded neck ought to give it away.

Susan would love to receive your wildlife sightings and photos. She can be contacted at susan@ncaves.com.

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April 2020

From Our House Behind the Churchyard, After a Storm

An hour after the storm, tree
limbs still sway, their green-leafed
twigs moving like the limbs

of swimmers in a sapphire sea.
Thunder booms in the distance
but they go on waving,

as if the lightning and the rain
are dear friends, departing. Beams
of brilliant light make gold

the ground and polish the branches
as puddles glitter beneath blades
of grass, silently sipping.

And high above the skittering
clouds, a red-tailed hawk circles
the churchyard, its wings

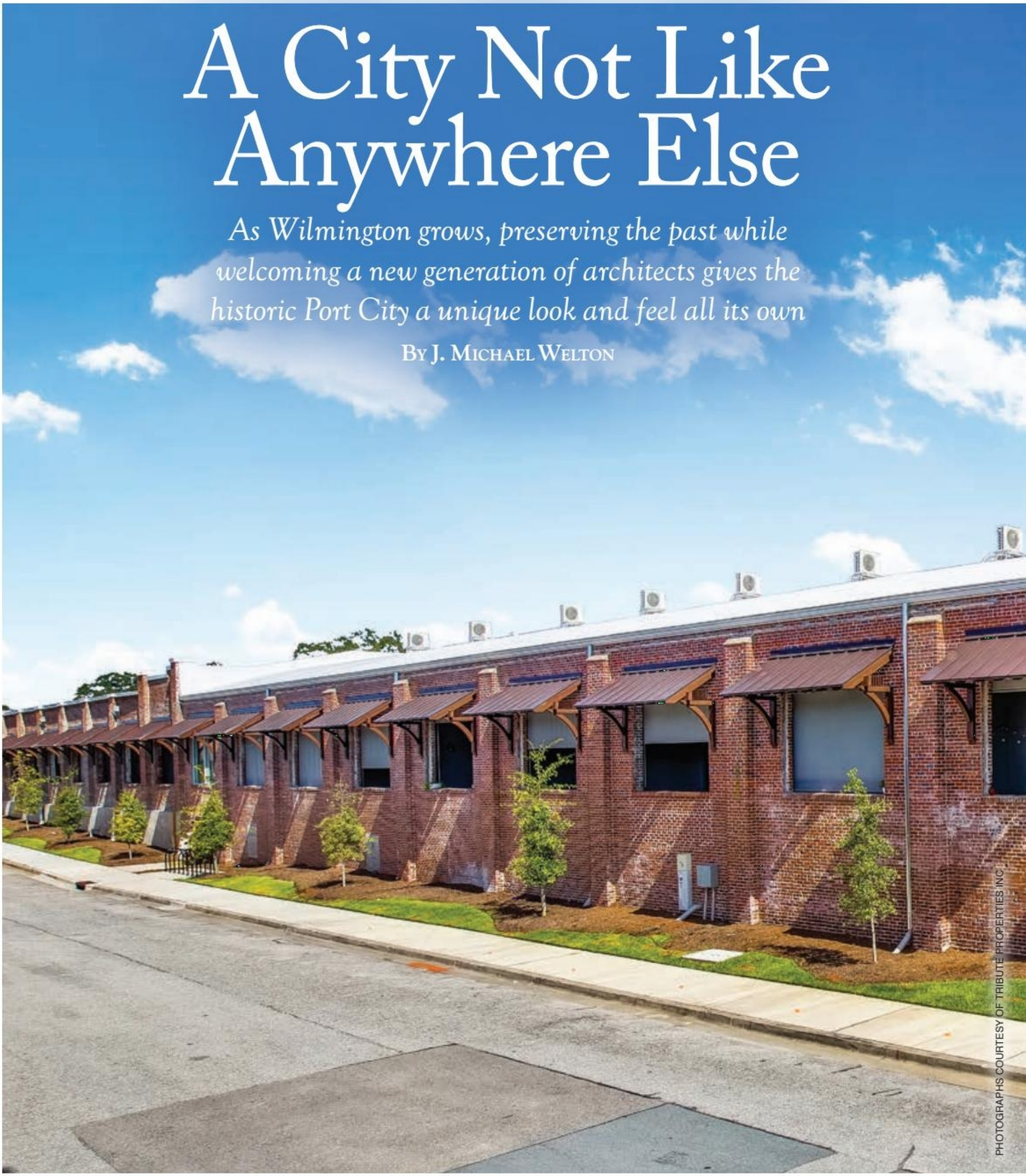
cupping the sodden, cerulean air
like a parishioner reaching
for a communal cup of wine.

– *Terri Kirby Erickson*

A City Not Like Anywhere Else

As Wilmington grows, preserving the past while welcoming a new generation of architects gives the historic Port City a unique look and feel all its own

By J. Michael Welton



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF TRIBUTE PROPERTIES INC.

Adaptive reuse meets hip: South Front II Apartments

Storefronts on Princess Street

Architecturally, Wilmington is in an enviable position.

For years, the city has created its own context — old and new, modern and traditional, commercial and residential — every day.

For starters, there's Historic Wilmington Foundation. Over the past 50 years, it's been spiffing up downtown assets for adaptive reuse — and attracting energetic owners to make it happen. I learned that a few months back, at first over coffee with HWF Executive Director Beth Rutledge at the century-old Dixie Grill downtown. Then came an eye-popping walking tour of classic 19th- and 20th-century architecture — once downtrodden, but now reborn.

HWF started out in 1966 as an offshoot of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, when the city was in stark decline. "There was no railroad and no infrastructure, and I-40 had cut us off," Rutledge says. "It showed in the houses and buildings — there were no historic districts, and nobody fought for them, either."

The organization started out by buying one building at a time, saving it and then selling it. "It had a phenomenal effect — they'd fix up one, and it became easier to do the next," she says.

Now HWF has preserved hundreds of properties in a variety of ways — moving houses, stabilizing buildings and loaning funds to owners to restore them. Along the way the organization has shown the real value of preserving the past. As it turns out, people not only want to experience history, but to spend money on it — either as owners or tourists.

"It's the heart of the city. It's what people come for and what they appreciate," she says. "These are the things that are rare and only in Wilmington — a city that's not like anywhere else. That's not by accident. It's by intention."

The Investors

Investors are seeing Wilmington's value too – like chef, author and PBS personality Vivian Howard. In late 2017, the Deep Run native and owner of two famous Kinston restaurants opened a third — in downtown Wilmington. Now Benny's Big Time, her pizzeria, has snagged its spot on historic Greenfield Street. Sure, Howard's got two more coming up in Charleston, S.C., but Wilmington was on her short list first, and that gave this city a bump-up in status.

Wilmington has also caught the eye of Jamie Branda, owner of a 41-year-old upscale Washington, D.C., restaurant called Floriana. He's planning to open his second venue at the corner of Market and Water Streets, after scoping out Birmingham and Huntsville in Alabama, and Chattanooga in Tennessee. When he found that Wilmington trumped them all in foot traffic, Branda opted to go where the people are. "It's what we know and something we feel comfortable with — that longtime residential and tourist business," he says. "It's what D.C. is like, so it felt like something where we would not have to over-tweak our model."

Then there's 38-year-old James Goodnight of Raleigh, who has acquired and renovated seven commercial buildings downtown, four on Front Street and three more on Princess Street. The latter

Michael Kersting and Beth Rutledge

trio — at 222, 226 and 230 Princess — were built in 1921, 1929 and 1942, respectively. They're all sweethearts from a bygone era, and they've all undergone careful restoration at the hands of Raleigh's Maurer Architects.

222 Princess, with its Mission-style architecture and tabby stucco, is faithfully restored. 226 Princess may have been altered in the 1960s or '70s, but it still shines today. Still, 230 Princess takes the cake. "It was very much intact — including the marble cladding on the front, the original door and the hardware," says Laurie Jackson, project manager and partner at Maurer. "It was built by an architect for an insurance office, but it looks like a bank even though it's very small."

And it's all but impossible to ignore two new projects on the riverfront. River Place will soon offer 92 luxury condominiums, complete with concierge, club room and roof-level pool. On 5 acres bordering the Riverwalk section near Port City Marina, Pier 33 will deliver 286 luxury apartments, 20,000 square feet of commercial space, and a parking garage with a 525-space capacity. What these two lack in architectural aesthetics will presumably be made up for in waterfront views.

The Moderns

The building that really caught this critic's eye is one that has undergone the least amount of change. First Bank, at the corner of Market and Second streets, was designed in 1958-59 by Charles Boney Sr., an early graduate of N.C. State's School of Design. Clearly a disciple of Mies van der Rohe, Boney executed his design here in bronze and glass outside and inside, with terrazzo and a dramatic, double-height lobby and floating staircase. Later, his son would design a deft and respectful addition at its rear.

Ironically, buildings like First Bank sometimes survive, completely intact, because poverty preserves them. "There might have been a time when people thought it was outdated, but couldn't afford to update it," Rutledge says. "Imagine someone wanting to modernize it — but because they didn't, we have what we have today."

Wilmington and its environs would see more influence from the School of Design, although traditional architecture surely ruled the second half of the 20th century. "The only reason there's modern architecture here is because a few standup architects promoted it," says Michael Kersting, an N.C. State grad and principal in the Wilmington firm that bears his name.

Those N.C. State modernists came here preaching the orthodoxy they'd been taught, then practiced it with near-religious fervor. "It wasn't until Boney and Haywood Newkirk and Ligon Flynn came around and challenged traditional architecture with a fair amount of modern work that their legacy came into being here," says Kersting.

Flynn in particular was prolific in Wilmington, designing his own office at 15 South 2nd St. Known now as The Atrium by Ligon Flynn, it's available for special events. Until his death in 2010, he also designed a number of public spaces in Wilmington, including the lobby and box office for Thalian Hall and the Lower Cape Fear Hospice.

He's best known, though, for his residential work, especially his groundbreaking modern homes on Figure Eight Island. In fact, once N.C. State grad and landscape architect Richard Bell laid out the island for development in the 1960s — preserving its natural heritage of marshland and maritime forests in the process — Flynn and Henry Johnston paved the way for modernists like Kersting to follow.

Anyone who wants to see what modern architecture has done for Wilmington and the oceanfront nearby would do well to take a ride to the beach with Kersting. He's responsible for 30 houses on Figure Eight, including five now on the boards or under construction, 28 more in Wrightsville Beach, and another 20 on the Intracoastal Waterway. He's done all that since setting up his firm in 1995.

Kersting's work is decidedly contemporary, though his clients may lean toward a more conservative approach. "We've done some traditional coastal architecture on the outside, but the detailing inside is a little edgier," he says. "A lot of our clients challenge us to find that balance of traditional beach vernacular with modern details."

Kersting isn't averse to showing a visitor his own designs on Figure Eight Island. But he'll also point out the architecture of Flynn and Johnston, as well as Hugh Newell Jacobsen's exquisite cottage on a crest overlooking the ocean. He'll also stop to ponder a sleek and gabled dogtrot, a classical form created by architects Mathew Weaver and Clark Tate, from Atlanta's Point Office.

"Modern architecture is a growing trend here now. Wilmington may be a conservative city, but that's slowing as people from the Northeast and California move in," Kersting says. "There's a cultural shift. It's far more inspired by contemporary styles: The younger generation wants more modern homes. A lot are coming to us, and we're getting it done."

The Districts

One more Wilmington architect with a modernist bent is Rob Romero. In 2016, he began designing homes and workspaces for the Cargo District, a three-block area bounded by 15th, 17th, Queen and Castle streets. Developer Leslie Smith specified the use of shipping containers, a familiar form for the Port City. "The guidelines from the city are specific about not seeing all that

PHOTOGRAPH B Y ANDREW SHERMAN

Clockwise: Cargo District views. Right: First Bank

RENDERING BY ROMERO ARCHITECTURE. BOTTOM LEFT PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY LISA BURTON VIA GOOGLE. BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTO BY ANDREW SHERMAN

corrugated siding, so there's cement board to conceal it in a way," Romero says. "But you can still tell it's a shipping container."

Stacked and welded together to yield nine units, Square Two Live + Work containers rest on wood frames for kitchens and baths. Each unit is a compact 620 square feet, with one bedroom, a custom-built staircase, concrete flooring downstairs, and vinyl plank flooring upstairs. There's custom cabinetry in the kitchen and bath, matte black plumbing fixtures, floor-to-ceiling tile in the glass-enclosed shower, a built-in queen bed, and a custom-fabricated aluminum balcony.

The Cargo District has transformed an area of town that once was not only neglected, but avoided. Now it's a destination for work-from-home businesses — and a residence for others. It may seem irregular, but that's why a new generation in Wilmington avidly seeks it out. "I get a ton of calls about it — it gets better and better, and brings in other people," Romero says. "It has a bright future, no doubt. There's a barber shop, a coffee place and a brewery."

Prior to 2002, the area now known as the North Fourth District was an abandoned African-American community undergoing demolition. "There were some people preserving six or seven buildings in five blocks, because that's all that was left," says developer David Spetrino, a design/build professional. "But basically, there was no reason to invest in North Fourth because nobody was living there. There were some houses left over from the railroad era, and some rundown tenements."

So Spetrino stepped up to the plate, bought an entire block, and began to execute his vision for residential development. "Between 2002 and 2007 we delivered 115 housing units in five different buildings," he says. "The first one was 15 units, the second was 26, the third was 10, the fourth was 17, and the fifth was 27."

He was creating condominiums where none had existed before. More development would follow, and the North Fourth District is mostly residential now, with some support services. It was initially made up of the 500, 600, 700 and 800 blocks of North Fourth Street, but now stretches out to the 900 and 1000 blocks. "The 500 block is old construction, 600 is 50/50, 700 is 70 percent new, and 800 is 90 percent new," he says. "It brings in about a quarter-million dollars in taxes now."

Many of the residents of the North Fourth District now are older, financially stable and looking for a walkable community.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF TRIBUTE PROPERTIES INC

Stylish living in the South Front District

"They may be in their twilight years, but they don't want to be in a golf course patio home," he says. "They're paying $750,000, and they get an elevator and a rooftop deck."

About the same time that Spetrino was building his condominiums at North Fourth, Tribute Properties was envisioning a new luxury development to be built on the site of the former Nesbit Courts public housing project, which had previously served as wartime military housing. It's now called the South Front District — and it's gone from down-at-the-heels to uber-hip almost overnight.

"It's evolved from a crime-ridden, desolate area into a booming community," says Molly McDonough, regional director at Tribute in Wilmington. "On Friday nights now there are restaurants, coffee bars, yoga classes, and the salt spa. It's a truly overwhelming transformation."

Tribute developed its apartments in two phases, keeping their original footprints. "We bought it in 2002 and in 2011 had our first move-in," she says. "They are luxury residences — a Class A property — and they are modern and LEED-certified."

Included are the original 217 renovated units, plus the 1940s-era revamped Block Shirt Factory, and 54 additional apartments, with rents ranging from $1,100 to $1,750. It's all residential, bounded by Front and Willard and Greenfield streets, on the south side of town. Commercial development has been encouraged by the city for industrial buildings on Greenfield Street. "It's pretty exceptional to evolve this nicely," she says.

These days, comparisons for Wilmington and its environs are almost inevitable. Some suggest similarities to Asheville, Charleston and even Savannah. But McDonough will have none of that. "We're in a league of our own," she says.

That's because she and her peers have learned how to create context, day after day, year after year. The result is a city that's now a magnet for innovative minds — and good design.

J. Michael Welton writes about architecture, art and design for national and international publications. He is architecture critic for The News & Observer *in Raleigh and author of* Drawing from Practice: Architects and the Meaning of Freehand *(Routledge, 2015). He is also editor and publisher of an online design magazine at www.architectsandartisans.com.*

Searching for Claude

Hidden in plain sight, a trio of surprising works of art by iconic Cape Fear artist Claude Howell are worthy of art pilgrimage

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY VIRGINIA HOLMAN

Claude Howell in his studio/apartment (1983)

COURTESY OF NEW HANOVER COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY, NORTH CAROLINA ROOM

Many North Carolinians know Claude Howell (1915-1997) as one of Wilmington's most notable artists. His visually complex, luminous paintings document life and work along the Carolina coast in such splendid works as *Weeding Cabbage* (1950), *Ocracoke Fishermen* (1956), and *Mending Nets* (1974). He was also a renowned storyteller and beloved commentator for WHQR radio.

Howell graduated from New Hanover High School in 1933, but due to the Great Depression and the death of his father, he did not attend college and never received a college degree. Instead, he worked until 1956 as a clerk with the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. He handed the bulk of his paycheck over to his mother, Jessie, who took care of all of life's mundane tasks like laundry and cooking so he could devote the remainder of his time to his art. According to Jan Kessler in *Claude Howell, Carolina Interpreter*, "This solution remained in effect until his mother's death in 1972, when he was 57."

Their arrangement helped Howell's art career flourish. In 1953, despite his lack of a college degree, he was invited to found the department of art at Wilmington College, now UNC Wilmington. He began by teaching at night, one class a week after his job at the railroad. Soon, he was working two jobs — one at the railroad and one teaching four nights a week at the college — a situation that made it difficult for him to work on his art. In 1956, he accepted a full-time position at the college as the chair of the department and resigned from the railroad.

Howell took his role as a professor seriously. In a journal entry dated June 3, 1964, he wrote, "I thoroughly enjoy teaching, but because I do it gets extremely strenuous. I get quite involved and really fight to make these students better not only as artists but as people too."

Howell's unwavering devotion to his community is evident in several surprising places in the Cape Fear region. It's well worth taking a weekend pilgrimage to view these remarkable works of art, each one a unique and valuable part of our history.

The evocative, color-saturated, 5-by-26-foot mural *The Miraculous Draft of Fishes* is located at Little Chapel on the Boardwalk (2 West Fayetteville St., Wrightsville Beach). I happened to visit the church on Ash Wednesday to photograph the painting, and several congregants stopped to chat with me as they left the midday service. One woman described the mural as "our great treasure." Another fondly recalled her time as an art history student of Howell's. Yet, when the painting was commissioned, there was a bit of controversy. In a journal entry dated December 1, 1951, Howell seems delighted that there "were absolutely no strings attached to the painting of the mural. Apparently, I can paint what I like." By that spring, he had a vision in mind: a triptych "much more complicated than anything I have undertaken before."

Although he was creating a work of religious art, Howell wanted to create something far from the "sickly sentimental type" of church art that he disliked. Instead, he aimed to "prove that modern art can be religious in feeling even more so than what we have in our churches today."

Not everyone agreed. In April 1952, Howell wrote that "our Assistant Pastor . . . was sceptical (sic) about the whole business," and said he "does not understand all this 'modernistic stuff.' Well, that is not all. He does not know who Michelangelo was. Can you imagine a minister not being familiar with the creator of the Sistine Chapel? I am becoming more and more interested in the early church and have discovered that we Presbyterians have ignored the first 1500 years of our church history. We assume that everything began with John Calvin."

Even after the installation of the painting, it was not appreciated immediately by some in the community. Howell took a measure of comfort that everyone "who has any concept of painting has been enthusiastic, but they are certainly in the minority . . . I am insulted constantly . . . I tell them I care little what they think, that I did it for God and not for them."

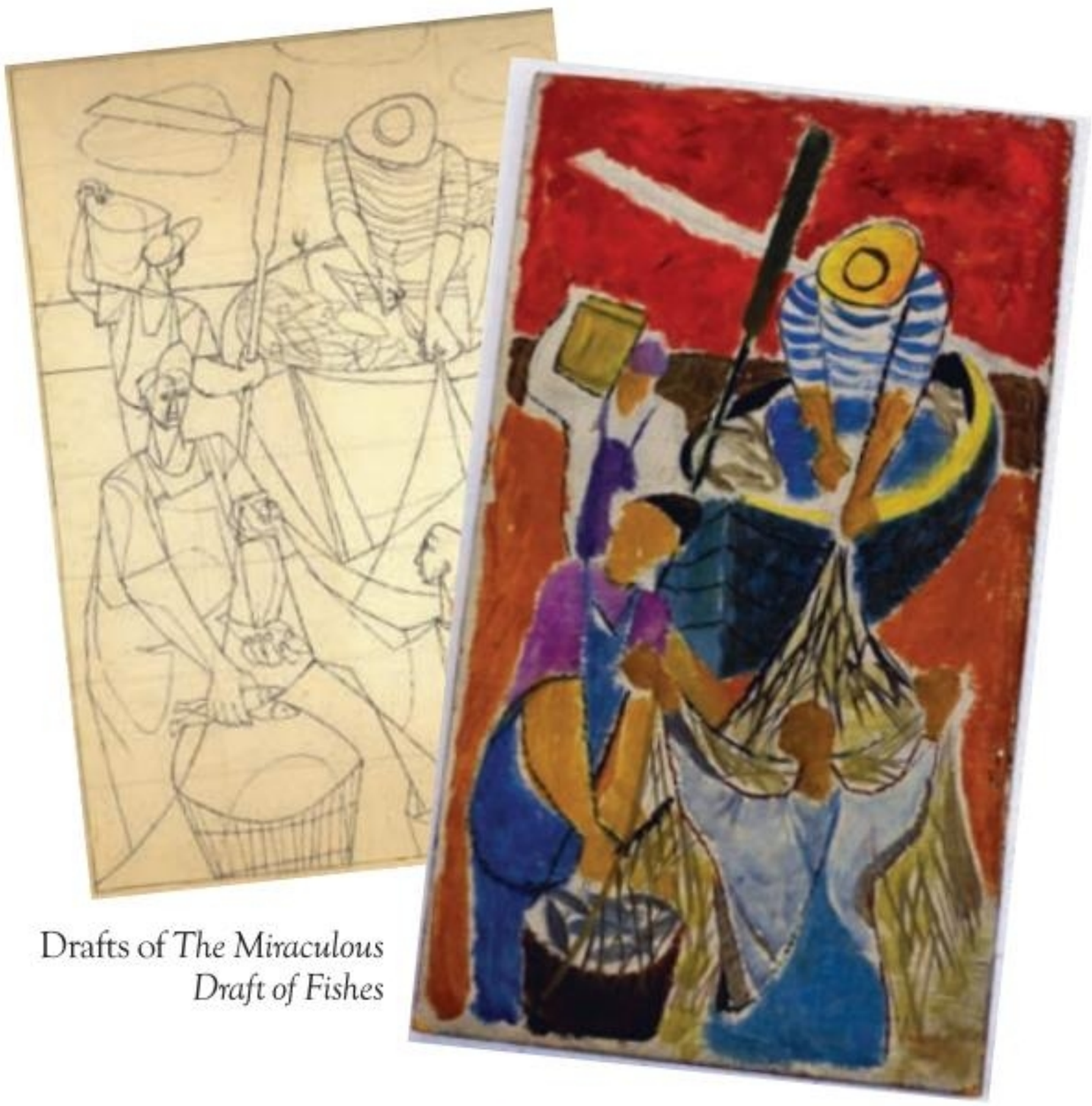
Eventually, members of the local Presbytery rallied. Howell's journal recounts receipt of a copy of a letter from one "Mr. Dallas Herring of Rose Hill written to Dr. Taylor, a local Presbyterian minister, who said in part" that (although the mural) "is somewhat daring in design it has a special kind of beauty which strikes a responsive chord." He then went on to add, "And I suppose as long as our theology remains conservative no one could blame the Presbytery for indulging in a little modern experimentation in art."

Today, a visit to the Little Chapel on the Boardwalk reveals a visionary painting, a work of art that its congregants and visitors now hold dear.

Port of Wilmington mosaic

A trip to Europe in 1949 left Howell feeling "overwhelmed by the mosaics in Ravenna . . . and dying to do one." The two large mosaics he received commissions for in the Cape Fear region didn't kill him, but they likely contributed to his sudden onset of paralysis in 1965. Several sources, including an entry in Howell's journal that recounts his attending physician's theory, indicate that the probable cause was some form of poisoning from his art materials.

The first mosaic was instigated by Howell's friend Stanley South, who was the head archaeologist at the state historic site at Brunswick Town (8884 St. Phillips Road, SE in Winnabow). A new visitor's center was scheduled for completion in 1964, and South helped Howell secure a commission to create a scene commemorating the historic 1748 Spanish attack on the village of Brunswick Town. Howell wanted to create a mosaic as exquisite as those he had seen in Italy, so he ordered Murano glass tesserae from a New York importer named Leo Popper. In his August 1964 journal entries, Howell wrote: "I cannot believe how beautiful the small glass enamel bits of color are. It is the most exciting and sensual color I have ever seen and I cannot wait to begin using it."



Drafts of *The Miraculous Draft of Fishes*

Howell and his assistant, "the quite talented" Catherine Hendricksen, worked long days. "It is extremely slow work. If we stick to it steadily all day we can cover almost a square foot. But so often we get into small areas and then each piece of enamel has to be cut to fit." Despite the tediousness of this work, and the fact that the glass shards were constantly cutting his fingers, he wrote that "I have never worked on anything I have enjoyed more."

With Hendricksen's help, the intricate, dazzling mosaic was completed in 1964. The bottom of the mosaic includes tiles highlighting Claude Howell's name and 1964 and then, several feet away and small enough to be overlooked, are the initials CH — not his initials, but Catherine Hendricksen's. According to Brunswick Town's historic interpreter Shannon Walker, when Hendricksen tiled in her initials, she cleverly included a small shard of historic Delft earthenware pottery recovered at the Brunswick Town archaeology site.

Unfortunately, funding for the visitor's center fell apart at the same time the mosaic was completed. It remained stored in a back room at the museum, its frame beginning to bow, for three years. The building was completed, and the mosaic was permanently installed, in 1967.

After he had completed *Spanish Attack on Brunswick* in December of 1964, he immediately began design work on another mosaic commissioned by the State Ports Authority (2508 Burnett Blvd.) in Wilmington. In March 1965, he wrote, "I have wanted for so long to

The Miraculous Draft of Fishes (triptych)

Spanish Attack on Brunswick

have something really big, impressive, and important in Wilmington. I am particularly pleased it will be here" at the Port of Wilmington.

This untitled large abstract tile mosaic spans a wall two stories high. "There is a large stairway in front of the mural," he wrote in his journal, "but it is very contemporary and I have decided to incorporate that in the design as the railing on the ship." As visitors ascended the staircase, he wanted them to have a sense of climbing aboard a ship deck chock full of remarkable superstructure. Unlike the mosaic at Brunswick Town, Howell did not help assemble this mosaic. Rather, "the work was being executed by Italian craftsmen in New Jersey in 1-by-2-foot sections. Paper would be pasted over each section and numbered. It was then to be shipped to Wilmington and the installation would be done locally and finally the paper would be washed off the face revealing the mosaic."

However, in August 1965, Claude Howell fell ill and suffered from significant paralysis for over a year. His working theory, recounted in Jan Kessler's book, was that the chemicals in the grout used in the Brunswick Town mosaic had entered his bloodstream via the many cuts on his fingers. Howell's journals indicate that his doctor also thought that some form of poisoning from his art materials was the likeliest culprit, despite the fact most of the standard tests of the day didn't show heavy metal poisoning.

Although Howell's body was ravaged, his mind remained sharp as ever. When he heard that the installation of his mosaic at the port was complete, he was determined to see it. In a 1987 WHQR radio commentary, Howell recalled how he convinced his cousin and a nurse to smuggle him out of the hospital and had them practically carry him into the building to inspect the mosaic.

"Employees of the shipping company saw me coming and were hovering together on the second-floor balcony to watch the dying artist coming to view his masterpiece. It was my greatest scene . . . I have always felt this had much to do with my recovery. I would always break into a broad grin whenever I recalled the day . . . and completely forgot to be sorry for myself."

About two years after its onset, Howell recovered from his paralysis and retaught himself how to paint. He continued to teach at UNCW until 1980, and also taught in community settings after his retirement. "I've taught about two-thirds of the people in Wilmington," he told Jan Kessler.

Claude Howell passed away in 1997.

Author and creative writing instructor Virginia Holman lives and writes in Carolina Beach.

A Slow Walk into the Soul

From the profane to the sacred, labyrinths are an ancient tool for journeying within

By Barbara J. Sullivan

Imagine you live in Sweden by the Baltic Sea, and the time is somewhere in the 13th century. You and all your friends depend on the men bringing in a good day's catch of cod and herring — but the problem is, you're plagued by trolls. Trolls, small as they are, can cause a lot of heartache — especially to fishermen setting out to sea in rough waters. Why not confuse the little people and even temporarily imprison them until the boats return safely?

Easily done. Just create a boulder-lined walkway along the ground, leading the rambling imps along a spiraling path that turns back on itself over and over again until the little people, disoriented and confused, reach the center, where they're kept out of harm's way. This was the very popular design concept behind hundreds of stone formations along the coast of Sweden, which can still be seen today. The sea-going Swedes formed these labyrinths in the classic "unicursal" pattern, meaning that there was only one way in and only one way out, no dead ends or false turns.

Trolls or no trolls, the whole concept of creating winding, switchback labyrinths seems to have hit a sweet spot in the human imagination across the planet, going back in time as far as the very beginnings of human art and architecture.

If you count wall drawings, basket-weaving designs, pottery decoration, coins, clothing patterns and indoor flooring, you could say that labyrinths have been a worldwide craze for millennia: The symbol appears in Neolithic rock carvings in Europe; Native American petroglyphs in Arizona; art and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome; in pharaonic Egypt, in India, Sumatra, Java and China; and abundantly in most parts of Europe and the British Isles.

It seems that humans of every age and culture have had an affinity for labyrinths. On a warm spring night in England, sometime in the distant medieval past, the village green (conveniently carved up into a turf labyrinth) would be just the place for young men and women to dance their way in and out of a fertility ritual. Across the English Channel, the vast stone cathedral-floor labyrinths of Chartres, Amiens or Reims in France would have provided a much more sober and reverential pathway — the goals in this case being prayer and penance. The labyrinth, whatever its uses, seems to be deeply satisfying as a universal, human-devised pattern.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY LOWER CAPE FEAR LIFE CARE

A Labyrinth is a winding path
to a center circle
It provides a quiet place
to find peace and relaxation
To release emotions and problems
Follow the path single - file
at your own pace
There are no confusing turns,
as it moves around and around
to get to the center
Walk quietly back to the entrance

We tend to equate the labyrinth with its near-relative, the tricky and confounding maze. A maze is purposely designed to frustrate the visitor, in a playful manner, with its many branching paths and dead-end corridors. Whether it's the English garden mazes of clipped yew or boxwood, or the currently popular corn mazes springing up all across the U.S., mazes are for entertainment, above all else. Labyrinths are different from mazes. They have a much more complex and, at times, deeply serious aspect. The center of the labyrinth may be the dwelling place of the trickster, the monster or the spirit of evil. Just as often, reaching the center of a labyrinth may signify an access to grace, enlightenment or contact with the sacred.

Very often, walking the labyrinth is symbolic of a journey in which something is given up once the visitor reaches the center and something new is attained upon exiting. It could be a meditative journey from the profane to the sacred, from death to rebirth, from trauma to healing. Labyrinths are purposely only wide enough for one person to walk along. Because of the twists and turns, footsteps have to be careful, slow and deliberate. This slow walking has been found to reduce respiratory rates, lower blood pressure and relieve stress. Apart from these physical benefits, labyrinths are now widely accepted as tools for coping with trauma and grief.

Lorraine Perry is a healing arts therapist, an avid gardener and a member of the congregation of the Church of the Servant in Wilmington, North Carolina. Back in 2003, those disparate elements coalesced in an unexpected way, and all of southeastern North Carolina has since become the beneficiary. On that day 17 years ago, Perry stepped out of her car at the Lower Cape Fear Hospice Care Center (LCFHCC), where she was scheduled to conduct horticulture therapy, and she saw a bright shaft of light radiating down through a stand of pine trees. An idea struck her — born of visits to English garden labyrinths and meditative walks along the floor labyrinth at her own church. This would be a perfect spot for a garden labyrinth for those hospice patients who were ambulatory, for caregivers, for staff and for other visitors.

With the blessing of the LCFHCC board and the generous contributions of money and labor from members of the Church of the Servant, her vision became a reality. A gravel and brick labyrinth, based on the classical unicursal design, was installed in the center of

the pine grove. Years later, when the site was needed for a building addition, the original labyrinth was torn up. However, by that time, its value as a healing tool had become so abundantly clear that LCFHCC engaged a local landscaping company to design and install a beautiful new labyrinth as the centerpiece for its Heritage Garden. Since then, they have also installed a garden labyrinth at the Brunswick Hospice Care Center in Bolivia, North Carolina.

In the Wilmington hospice center garden, visitors are greeted by natural beauty all four seasons of the year — whether it's the bright red and orange fall foliage of Japanese maples, the winter pinks of camellias, the pastels of spring azaleas and water irises, or the drifts of summer color from black-eyed Susans, Mexican petunias, canna lilies and roses. The garden is profuse with perennials, flowering shrubs and multi-textured evergreen foliage. Benches provide spots for rest and contemplation, and a stream ripples gently under a series of small bridges providing a soft background murmur.

In the secret garden gazebo behind the labyrinth, butterfly and chrysalis sculptures by local artist Dumay Gorham hang from above, suggesting the patterns of change and rebirth. Elsewhere in the garden, the large bronze sculpture, *Safe Passage*, by Karen Crouch, echoes Native American creation myths in which all of life grows out of the back a turtle. In this case the turtle's shell hosts a branching tree with a large seed pod nestled in its branches, suggesting regeneration and the cycles of life.

The hospice garden labyrinth is made of brick and turf grass, is of classic unicursal design, and is just wide enough for one person to walk along. In Perry's work at the care center she may provide help to a caregiver who's going through the death of a loved one and is unsure of what awaits him or her at the end of that journey. She might say, "Let's take a walk in the labyrinth, and the labyrinth might ground you emotionally so you can think more clearly about what lies ahead."

She explains that she won't be walking the labyrinth herself, but she will ask that the person wait for her when he or she reaches the center. Once they meet in the center she may say, "I'd like you to use this time to feel the grass beneath your feet and see if it provides a grounding that will then charge you with the ability to walk out of the labyrinth with some peace." The walk in is for discovery, Perry explains. The walk out is for resolution. Over the many years that she

has used the labyrinth in her healing arts work she has found it to be an invaluable tool.

Anyone can make a walking labyrinth. It can be as ephemeral as tracings on the sand at the beach, colorful flower petals arrayed on a patch of lawn, smooth stones arranged in a shallow stream. There are even labyrinths in the middle of the woods where the walking path coils back and forth among the trees. Garden labyrinths can be outlined in whatever catches the gardener's fancy: zinnias or kale, native grasses or seashells.

In my own backyard, after having a professional stonemason lay out the path, I planted dwarf Mondo grass, dwarf narcissus and poppies in the furrows in between. And yes, I can attest that walking the labyrinth does slow down your breathing and reduce stress. It is a great place for meditation and relaxation.

Most importantly, however, I am finally rid of those pesky garden trolls.

Barbara Sullivan is a regular Salt *contributor and the author of* Garden Perennials for the Coastal South.

Love in the Heights

A preservation-minded couple's sensitive restoration of a turn-of-the-century house in Carolina Heights

By William Irvine · Photographs By Rick Ricozzi

In a 1908 feature story, the *Wilmington Morning Star* informed its readers about a new neighborhood taking shape northeast of Market and 17th streets. Carolina Heights promised "in the very near future to be not only Wilmington's most fashionable, but one of its most delightful suburbs." Developed by Mary Bridgers, an heiress of Col. Robert Bridgers of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad and other business interests, Carolina Heights featured capacious lots divided by service roads through the center of the blocks off the numbered streets. Bridgers recruited Chicago architect Burett H. Stephens to assist in the designs of the neighborhood's substantial houses, an appealing mix of Georgian and Colonial Revival, Shingle style, and all manner of Bungalow variations.

It was this appealing mix of architecture and walkable scale that attracted Wade and Ashley Wilson to Carolina Heights. "We fell in love with it," says Wade. "It's a front-porch neighborhood. You can sit out front and wave to the neighbors. The lots are a quarter-acre, so they are spacious. You get a nice neighborhood feel but can still maintain your privacy."

The Wilsons' attractive 1909 Dutch Colonial on Princess Street, designed by Burett Stephens, will be featured as part of this year's Azalea Festival Home Tour, sponsored by the Historic Wilmington Foundation.

When the Wilsons purchased their house in 2014, it had been empty for about five years. Known as the Judge Johnny Walker House for its

previous owners, it still had good bones, but needed some modern upgrades: The house had no central air-conditioning and radiator heat; the old wiring needed to be replaced as well.

And the interiors? "They were state-of-the-art 1965," says Ashley with a grin. This included wall-to-wall carpets, which were glued to floors of fine yellow pine. "I spent many months removing the carpet from these beautiful floors," she says. Almost all of the original architectural moldings are still in place. In the living room, 10-foot ceilings are graced with thick beams. The Wilsons were also attracted by the original large front windows, which are complemented by two sets of French doors.

While they were poking around in the attic one day, they found an old box of light fixtures covered in dirt and dust. "Wade kept moving that box around, but I wouldn't let him throw it out," says Ashley. A sensible decision, because they turned out to be the original solid brass light fixtures. Two of these now grace the downstairs, a hanging pendant lamp in the front hallway, and a vintage four-light hanging lamp in the dining room.

The Wilsons have long supported local artists, and the

downstairs is a veritable gallery, with oil paintings and works on paper by Claude Howell, Jack Berkman, Peggy Hall, and Sam Bissette, among others. There is also a charming framed quilted artwork depicting a jester fishing on the edge of a crescent moon. "This is a work by the nuns of St. Mary — formerly in Jester's Cafe," says Ashley. A sunny Italian landscape by Chip Hemingway graces the kitchen.

The front hallway is flanked by the living and dining room, and the latter has a distinctly Arts and Crafts aura, thanks in part to the shoulder-high wainscoting that surrounds the room with a shelf atop it. "I think these were certainly used to display china — there is a plate rail along the back of it," says Ashley. The shelf now holds silver cups and other family pieces. Family portraits hang above.

In the corner of the room is a coal-burning fireplace with a magnificent cast-iron carved plank in front of it. "That's original to the house—it's known as a summer cover, what you would use to conceal the fireplace off-season," says Wade.

The kitchen is in the back of the house, and the Wilsons incorporated a former back porch, which is now a comfortable seating area. Ashley kept the old side-by-side sink — great for cleaning up — and there is a countertop of black granite and a stove for a serious cook.

One of the benefits of a Dutch Colonial design is that it gives you

a lot of space under the roofline, and the upstairs floor of this house is no exception. It is deceptively spacious, with four bedrooms and two bathrooms surrounding a central hallway. One end of the second floor, originally a sleeping porch, has now been divided into two rooms, a laundry room and a bathroom with a lovely claw-foot tub. The master suite also features a walk-in closet with movable shelving and a state-of-the-art bathroom. There is also a "man-cave" for Wade that features reclining chairs that Ashley mentions would only be acceptable upstairs and out-of-sight. The overall effect is a house lovingly restored, but with a keen eye to 21st-century living.

"When you have a house this old, you realize that not everything is going to be perfect," says Wade. "All hundred-year-old houses will have termites, old plumbing and wiring. But you know what? It's all worth it."

William Irvine is the senior editor of Salt. *His latest book,* Do Geese See God? A Palindrome Anthology, *is available on Amazon.*

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Key Dates:

Nominations Close | May 22, 2020

Applications Close | June 5, 2020

Winners Selected | July 31, 2020

Gala & Golf Event | September 28, 2020

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ALMANAC

April

By Ash Alder

April doesn't make a grand announcement.

She's subtle. Sort of hums to let you know she's close. Flutters in the periphery. And when she lands — like the ruby-throated hummingbird at the garden feeder — the world sings out.

April is a month of sweet transition. Purple martins replace purple finches. Yellow jessamine twists, climbs, dances across the landscape. Silver maple is flowering, and on the ground beneath it, you find the first of hundreds of brilliant green samaras (seed pods) that will spiral to the earth in the coming weeks. You pick up the fruit, spin it between your thumb and forefinger, hold it in your palm as if you are holding the wings of some tiny, mythical creature.

A ragtag choir of a dozen songbirds blurts out their threats and primal longings, and just beyond the flowering maple, a skinny tabby all but grins while brushing past the garden path.

The mornings are knit scarf- and corduroy-cool, but in the afternoon, your feet are bare, and you are sunning in a patch of tender young grass.

April is the last frost, dahlias in the garden, spring rain and fresh asparagus.

And as the first seeds of summer crops are sown (green beans, melons, cukes and squashes) you realize this: *April is your answered prayer. Here and now. Late winter's wish, come true.*

Rain and Glory

Cows lie down this month same as any. But if you're curious to know when the April showers are coming, observe a pine cone (they close when rain is on its way).

Of course, you don't have to wait until May for the flower show. This month, fragrant jessamine and blooming azalea would be enough to satisfy any flower-loving gardener. But look and see hummingbird candy everywhere: coral honeysuckle, iris, buckeye, wild columbine.

Now is time to plant dahlias, petunias, angelonia, heliotrope, lantanas and begonias. And in late April, color your midsummer garden electric with glory lily tubers. This tropical vine grows fast, climbing upward of 7 feet with its curling, grasping tendrils. Its flaming red and brilliant yellow flowers make it an absolute showstopper, and with its long, bright green stamen dangling beneath its down-facing petals, this deer-resistant "Flame of the Woods" resembles, to this nature-lover, some kind of exotic jellyfish.

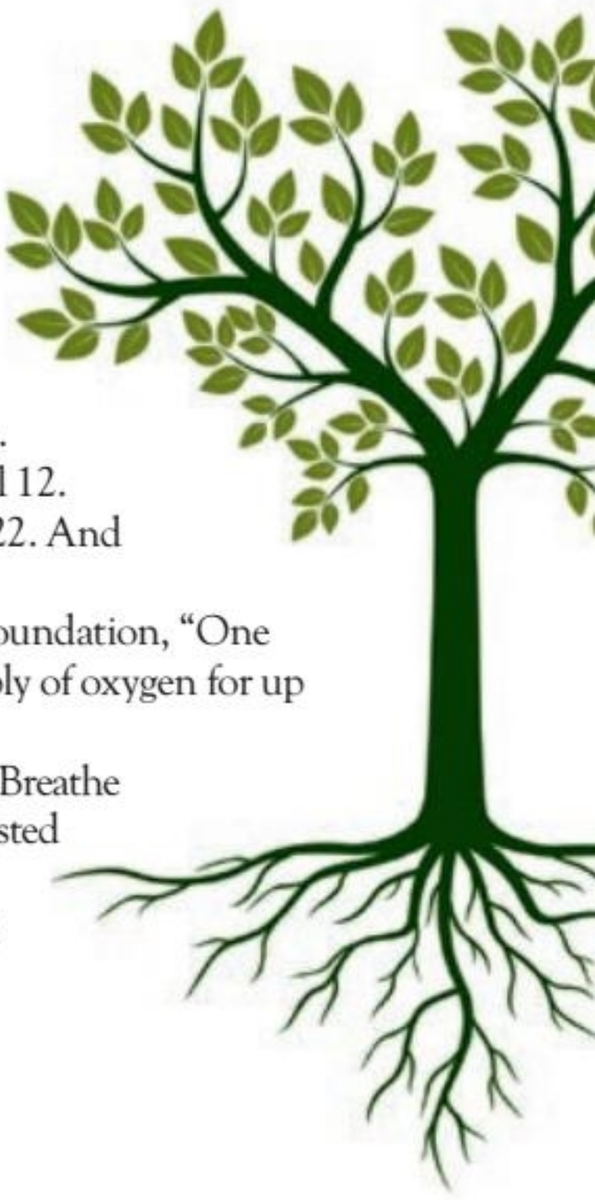
Oh, lovely April: Bring on the rain, bring on the glory.

Hug a Tree

April is a month of celebration. Easter Sunday, of course, on April 12. Earth Day on Wednesday, April 22. And on Friday, April 24, Arbor Day.

According to the Arbor Day Foundation, "One large tree can provide a day's supply of oxygen for up to four people."

Let that land for just a moment. Breathe it in, if you will. And if you're interested in learning about the foundation's bold "Time for Trees" initiative and how you can get involved, visit www.arborday.org.



Warm Your Bones

Spring is here, yes. But if you can't seem to shake the final chill of winter, here's one for you: golden milk. Warm and delicious and, according to Ayurvedic medicine, a powerful healing tonic for inflammation and digestive issues, this holistic, dairy-free beverage gets its golden color from its star ingredient: turmeric.

There are dozens of recipes available online. Most call for coconut or almond milk. Here's one borrowed from WellnessMama.com that serves four. Golden milk in five glorious minutes. But if you're worried about the possibility of staining your blender and/or countertops, this may be risky business.

Ingredients

2 cups milk of choice, such as almond pecan, coconut or dairy
1 teaspoon turmeric
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
Pinch of ground pepper
Tiny piece of fresh peeled ginger root or 1/4 teaspoon ginger powder
Pinch of cayenne pepper (optional)
1 teaspoon raw honey or maple syrup or to taste (optional)

Instructions

Blend all ingredients, except cayenne pepper and honey, in a high-speed blender until smooth.

Pour mixture into small saucepan and heat for 3-5 minutes over medium heat until hot, but not boiling.

Add cayenne pepper and honey, if desired; stir to combine. Drink immediately.

Arts Calendar

Cape Fear Career Expo

4/15

History and Architecture Hike

4/16

Ukeleles Unite Concert

4/18

To add a calendar event, please contact calendar@saltmagazinenc.com. Events must be submitted by the first of the month, one month prior to the event.

4/7 Lecture: "The First Wilmington Campaign," Rick Morrison
6 p.m.-7:30 p.m. Historian Rick Morrison will discuss Lord Cornwallis' 1780 Southern Campaign and Wilmington's role. Donation: $5. Burgwin-Wright House and Gardens, 224 Market St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 762-0570 or burgwinwrighthouse.com.

4/8 Kim MaeJa ChangMu Dance Company
7:30 p.m. This acclaimed South Korean dance troupe, founded in 1976, does interpretations of dance movements from various periods of Korean history. Admission: $32. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

4/9 Spring Eggventure
9 a.m. - 12. p.m. Among today's kid-centered Eggventures: Animal Eggs and Nests, the Egglympics, Storytime, and a Spring Nature Hike. Admission: $5. Halyburton Park, 4099 South 17th St., Wilmington. Info: halyburtonpark.com.

4/11 Wilmington Geek Expo
10 a.m.-5 p.m. This is the place to meet comic book creators, TV stars, vendors, and explore all kinds of geeky topics, including gaming, anime and a cosplay contest. Admission: $10-$20. Wilmington Convention Center, 515 Nutt St., Wilmington. For info: (757) 578-5177 or wilmingtongeekexpo.com.

4/10-11 Southport Spring Festival
Friday 10 a.m.- 5 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m-4 p.m. This weekend's festival will feature more than 150 craft vendors as well as live entertainment, a trackless train, and a plant sale. Admission: Free. Franklin Square Park, Corner of Howe and West Streets, Southport. For info: (910) 620-2308 or downtownsouthport.org.

4/11 Metropolitan Opera Live in HD
1 p.m.-4:20 p.m. Osher Lifelong Learning Institute presents Puccini's Tosca with soprano Anna Netrebko and tenor Brian Jagde. Admission: $20-$24. Lumina Theater, UNCW, 615 Hamilton Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3195 or uncw.edu/olli/metopera.html.

4/13 Rain: A Tribute to the Beatles
7:30 p.m. Cape Fear Stage presents Rain: A Tribute to the Beatles. The band will celebrate the anniversary of *Abbey Road*. Admission: $38-$89. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

4/14 The Revivalists in Concert
6 p.m. Admission: $55. Greenfield Lake Amphitheater, 1941 Amphitheater Drive, Wilmington. Info: greenfieldlakeamphitheater.com.

4/15 Cape Fear Career Expo
11 a.m.-4 p.m. A job fair with representatives from health care, manufacturing, retail, sales and construction firms. Admission: Free. Coastline Convention Center, 503 Nutt St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 343-2015 or gatehouselive.com/expos/community/wilmington.

4/16 Simone Dinnerstein and Matt Haimowitz: An Evening of Beethoven and Glass
7:30 p.m. A celebration of the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth, paired with the contemporary music of Philip Glass. Admission: $25-$75. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 962-3500 or uncw.edu/arts/presents/2019-2020/beethoven-and-glass.html.

4/16 History and Architecture Hike
10 a.m. Local historian Beverly Tetterton will lead a 2-mile History and Architecture Hike today. Admission: Free. MLK Jr. Community Center, 401 S. 8th St., Wilmington. For info:

Bellamy Mansion Family Fun Day

4/19

10th Annual Flytrap Frolic

4/25

North Carolina Symphony Orchestra Concert

4/30

(910) 254-0907 or wilmingtonrecreation.com.

4/18 Low Country Boil
5 p.m.-8 p.m. The North Carolina Coastal Federation hosts a Low Country Boil fundraiser. There will also be a coastal-themed silent auction. Admission: $50-$60. Hanover Seaside Club, 601 S. Lumina Ave., Wrightsville Beach. For info: (252) 393-8185 or nccoast.org/event/2020-low-country-boil.

4/18 26th Annual Pleasure Island Seafood, Blues and Jazz Festival
11 a.m.-10 p.m. Delbert McClinton headlines this all-day party, which features an Art and Wine Garden, crafts, and a Kidz Zone. Admission: $40. Fort Fisher Air Force Recreation Area, 118 Riverfront Road, Kure Beach. Info: (910) 458-8434 or pleasureislandnc.org.

4/18 The Great Dubois
3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. A two-person comedy circus for all ages with juggling, unicycles, magic and more. Admission: $15-$75. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

4/18 Oak Island Lighthouse Run
7:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. The Oak Island Lighthouse Run features a half-marathon, 10K, 5K and 1-mile Fun Run. Admission: $30-$60. Middleton Park Extension, SE 46th St., Southport, NC. For info: (910) 457-6964 or oakislandlighthouserun.com.

4/18 Ukeleles Unite Concert
7 p.m. Tonight's concert features local string bands Mother's Brothers, Unresolved String Band, Winter Park Presbyterian Ukulele Choir, Karen Callaway and Ed Beck. A strum-along follows, so bring your strings! Admission: Free. Winter Park Presbyterian Church, 4501 Wrightsville Ave., Wilmington. For info: (910) 791-5893 or winterparkpres.org.

4/18-19 Carolina Pro-Am SUP Surf Competition
Admission: Free for spectators. Crystal Pier, South Lumina Ave. and Nathan St., Wrightsville Beach. Info: (910) 619-0511 or worldpaddleassociation.com/event/2020-carolina-pro-am.

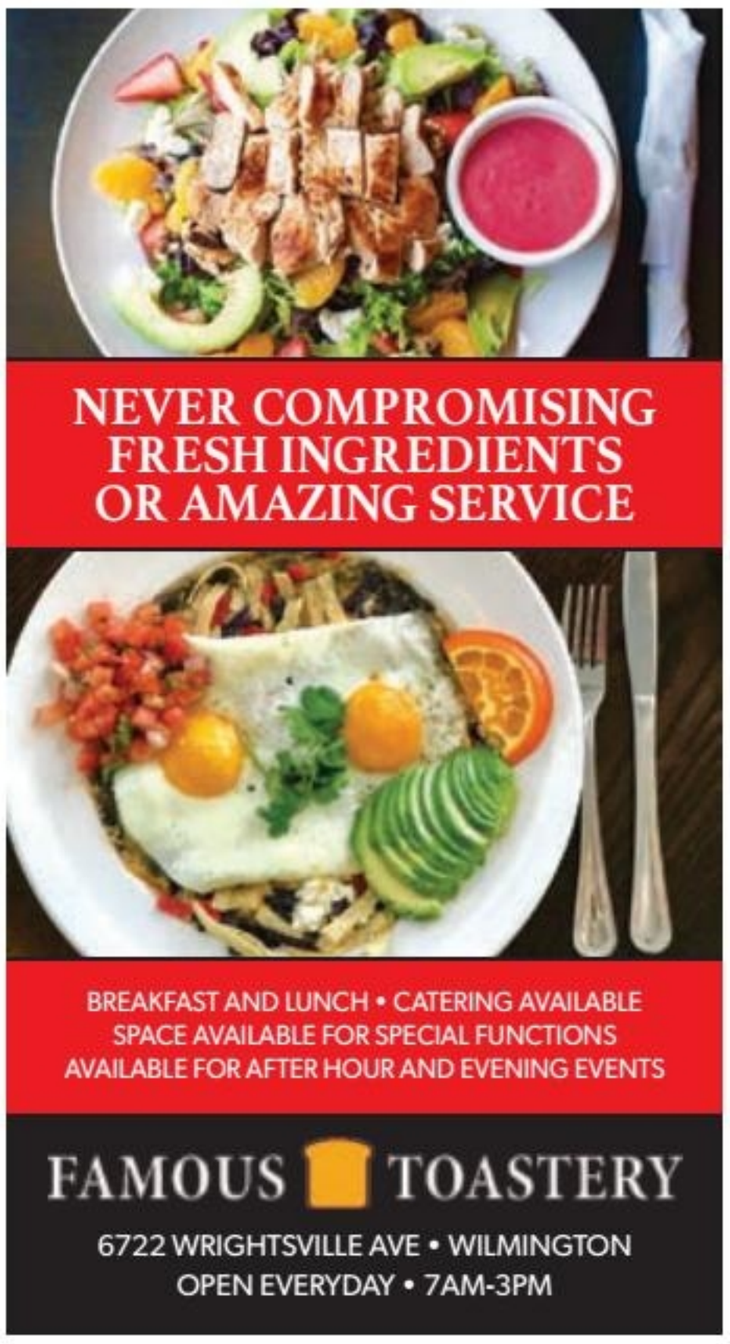
4/18-19 O'Neill East Coast Grom Tour
Carolina Beach Surf Shop presents the O'Neill East Coast Grom Tour.Admission: Free for spectators. Alabama Avenue and South Lake Park Blvd., Carolina Beach. For info: (910) 458-7005 or cbsurfshop.com.

4/19 Cape Fear Chorale Concert
4 p.m. The Cape Fear Chorale performs Franz-Joseph Haydn's *Mass in D Minor.* The Chorale will be joined by Laney High School's choral ensemble for a performance of Haydn's *Te Deum*. Admission: Free. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515 Wagoner Dr., Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500 or capefearchorale.org.

4/19 Family Fun Day
1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Family Fun Day at the Bellamy is chock full of activities, from pony rides and a petting zoo to face painting, storytelling and living music. Admission: Free. Bellamy Mansion Museum, 503 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-3700 or bellamymansion.org.

4/19 Fifth Annual Tinted Turtle Trot
10 a.m. The fifth annual Tinted Turtle 5K and 1-Mile Run takes place today in Carolina Beach with a new Kids' Dash and bursts of color for runners and walkers. Proceeds benefit Island Montessori School. Admission: $5-$35. Mike Chappell Park, 501 Dow Road South, Carolina Beach. Info: tintedturtletrot.com.

4/20 Toots and the Maytals in Concert
7:30 p.m. Outback presents Toots and the Maytals in concert. Admission: $32-$175. Greenfield Lake Amphitheater, 1941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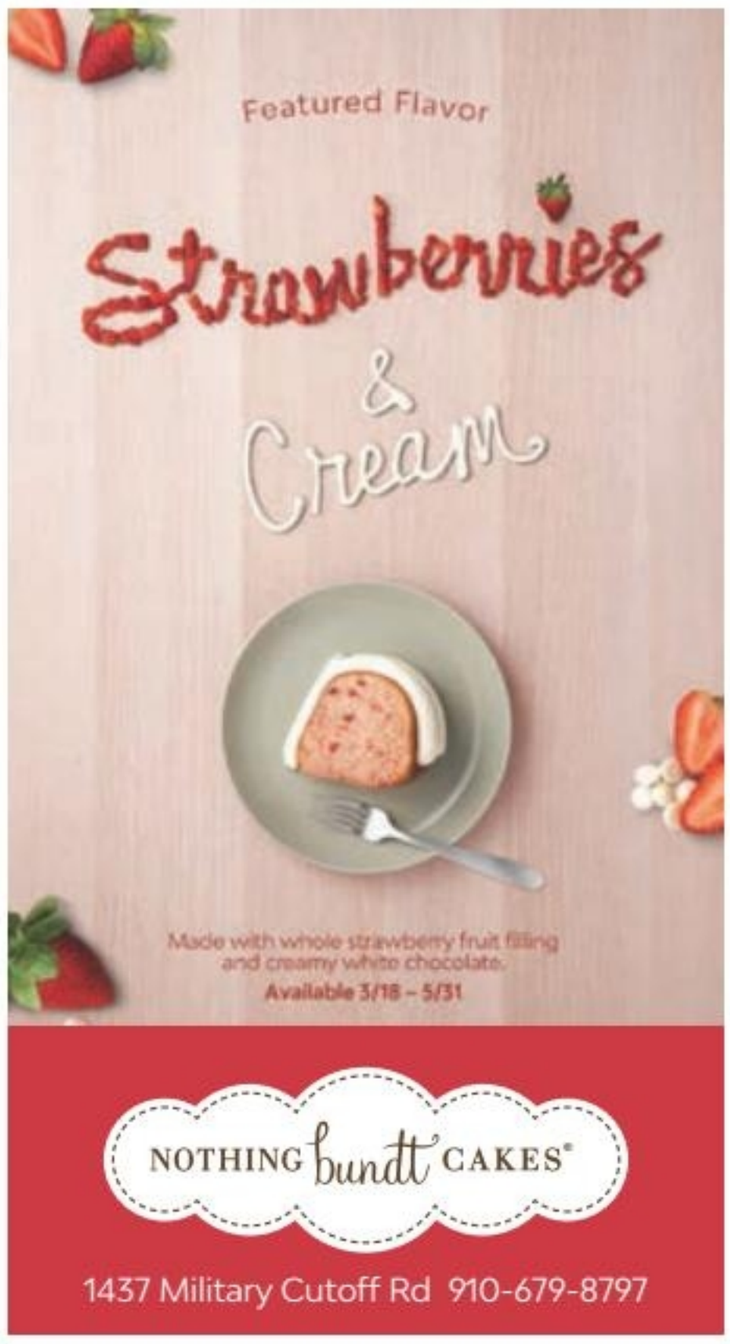


Amphitheater Drive, Wilmington. Info: greenfieldlakeamphitheater.com.

4/20-21 Wideman Davis Dance: Migratuse Ataraxia
7:30 p.m. This site-specific multimedia performance and dinner centers on the black experience and embodiment in Southern antebellum domestic spaces. Admission: $25. Bellamy Mansion Museum, 503 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or wilsoncentertickets.com.

4/21-22 Riverdance 25th Anniversary Show
Tues., 7:30 p.m.; Wed., 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. This celebration of the original *Riverdance* features a newly recorded soundtrack by composer Bill Whelan and a revamping of the groundbreaking show with new lighting, projection, stage and costumes by the original producers. Admission: $41-$85. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

4/24-26 Freaky Friday: The Musical
7:30 p.m. Mother and daughter magically swap bodies in this musical based on the Disney Channel original movie. Admission: $15. Community Arts Center, 120 S. Second St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1788 or thalian.org.

4/25 4th Annual Bluegrass Bash
6 p.m. This annual celebration starts in the parking lot with local beer and food trucks and moves indoors to the Main State and lobby of Thalian Hall with performances by local bluegrass bands. Admission: $15-$50. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 632-2285 or thalian.org.

4/25 10th Annual Flytrap Frolic
9 a.m.-1 p.m. The Coastal Land Trust hosts the 10th annual Flytrap Frolic, a celebration of native carnivorous plants that live in eastern North Carolina. Garden hikes, arts and crafts and carnivorous plants for sale (including Venus flytraps) will be offered. Admission: Free. Stanley Rehder Carnivorous Plant Garden, 3800 Canterbury Road, Wilmington. For info: (910) 790-4524 or coastallandtrust.org/event/flytrap-frolic.

4/25 Kure Beach Street Festival
11 a.m.-5 p.m. An afternoon of live music, face painting, children's entertainment, and arts and crafts in Ocean Front Park. Admission: Free. Ocean Front Park, 105 Atlantic Ave., Kure Beach. Info: (910) 458-8216 or townofkurebeach.org.

4/25 17th Annual Making Local Legends Gala
6:30 p.m-11 p.m. Tonight's event will feature a red carpet cocktail reception, heavy hors d'oeuvres and drinks, and a lip syncing contest. Proceeds benefit the Carousel Center. Admission: $100. Union Station, Cape Fear Community College, 502 N. Front St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 254-9898 or carouselcenter.org/gala-2020.

4/26 Chamber Music Wilmington Concert
4 p.m. This afternoon's concert is titled "Mix Tape Anniversary Celebration," with music for strings, piano and winds. Admission: $30. Beckwith Recital Hall, UNCW, 5270 Randall Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 962-3500 or chambermusicwilmington.org,

4/26 Fifth Annual Wilmington Daddy Daughter Dance
4 p.m.-7 p.m. The fifth annual Daddy Daughter Dance includes food, a dessert bar, photo booth, raffle, and—of course—dancing. Proceeds benefit the Cape Fear Community Land Trust. Admission: $65. DREAMS Center of Wilmington, 901 Fanning St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 218-0022 or wilmingtondaddydaughter.com.

4/30 North Carolina Symphony Orchestra Concert
7:30 p.m. Tonight's performance, under the direction of conductor Grant Llewellyn, includes Caroline Shaw's *The Listeners* and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*. Admission: $51.Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

4/30 Alligators Workshop
9 a.m.-4 p.m. Becky Skiba, of the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, holds a daylong workshop on the alligators of southeastern North Carolina. There will be a trip to Lake Waccamaw to observe alligators. Ages 16 and older. Admission: $10. Halyburton Park, 4099 South 17th St., Wilmington. Info: halyburtonpark.com.

4/30 Philip Fortenberry: The Hands of Liberace
7:30 p.m. Celebrated pianist Philip Fortenberry, whose works includes performances in Broadway shows *Cats* and *The Lion King* and HBO's *Behind the Candelabra*, will perform this evening. Admission: $15-$42. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

WEEKLY HAPPENINGS

Monday

Wrightsville Farmers Market
8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside beach market offering a variety of fresh, locally grown produce, baked goods, plants and unique arts and crafts. Seawater Lane, Wrightsville Beach. Info: (910) 256-7925 or www.townofwrightsvillebeach.com.

Tuesday

Wine Tasting
6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Free wine tasting hosted by a wine professional plus small plate specials all night. Admission: Free. The Fortunate Glass, 29 South Front St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 399-4292 or www.fortunateglass.com.

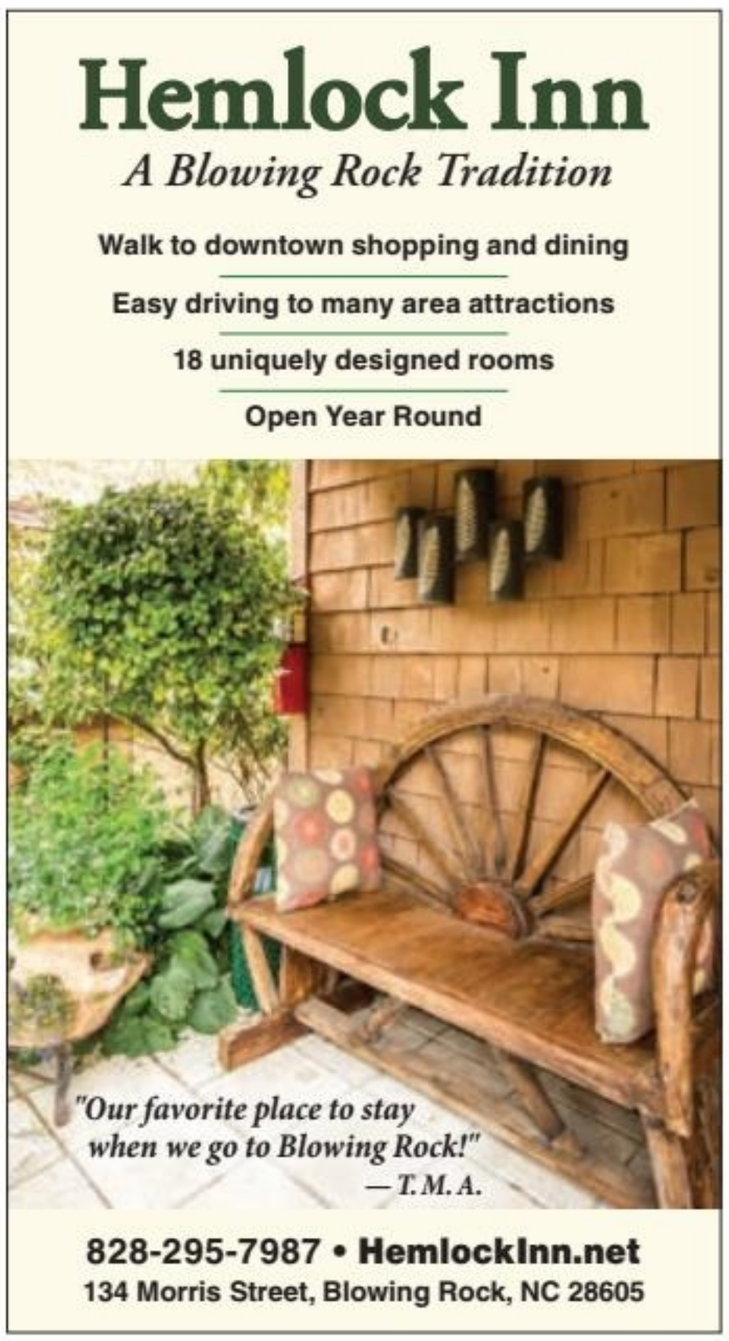
Cape Fear Blues Jam
8 p.m. A night of live music performed by the area's best Blues musicians. Bring your instrument and join in the fun. Admission: Free. The Rusty Nail, 1310 South Fifth Ave., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1888 or www.capefearblues.org.

Wednesday

Free Wine Tasting at Sweet n Savory Cafe
5 p.m. – 8 p.m. Sample delicious wines for free. Pair them with a meal, dessert, or appetizer and learn more about the wines of the world. Live music starts at 7. Admission: Free. Sweet n Savory Cafe, 1611 Pavilion Place, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-0115 or www.swetnsavorycafe.com.

Weekly Exhibition Tours
1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. A weekly tour of the iconic Cameron Arts Museum, featuring presentations about the various exhibits and the selection and installation process. Cameron Arts Museum, 3201 South Seventeenth St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartsmuseum.org.

Ogden Farmers Market
8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Local farmers, producers and artisans sell fresh fruits, veggies, plants, eggs, cheese, meat, honey, baked goods, wine, bath products and more. Ogden Park, 615 Ogden Park Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com/events-calendar/ogden-farmers-market.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Poplar Grove Farmers Market
8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Open-air market held on the front lawn of historic Poplar Grove Plantation offering fresh produce, plants, herbs, baked goods and handmade artisan crafts. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 US Highway 17 North, Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.poplargrove.org/farmers-market.

Thursday

Wrightsville Beach Brewery Farmers Market
2 p.m. – 6 p.m. Come support local farmers and artisans every Thursday afternoon in the beer garden at the Wrightsville Beach Brewery. Shop for eggs, veggies, meat, honey, and handmade crafts while enjoying one of the Brewery's tasty beers. Stay for live music afterwards. Admission: Free. Wrightsville Beach Brewery, 6201 Oleander Dr., Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-4938 or www.wbbeer.com.

Yoga at the CAM
12–1 p.m. Join in a soothing retreat sure to charge you up while you relax in a beautiful, comfortable setting. Sessions are ongoing and are open to both beginners and experienced participants. Admission: $5–8. Cameron Art Museum, 3201 South Seventeenth St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartmuseum.org.

Friday and Saturday

Cape Fear Museum Little Explorers
10 a.m. Meet your friends in Museum Park for fun, hands-on activities! Enjoy interactive circle time, conduct exciting experiments, and play games related to a weekly theme. Perfect for children ages 3 to 6 and their adult helpers. Admission: Free. Cape Fear Museum, 814 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-4370 or www.capefearmuseum.com.

Blackwater Adventure Tours
Join in an educational guided boat tour from downtown Wilmington to River Bluffs, exploring the mysterious beauty of the Northeast Cape Fear River. See website for schedule. River Bluffs, 1100 Chair Road, Castle Hayne. Info: (910) 623-5015 or www.riverbluffsliving.com.

Saturday

Carolina Beach Farmers Market
8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Outdoor "island-style" market featuring live music and local growers, producers and artisans selling fresh local produce, wines meats, baked goods, herbal products and handmade crafts. Carolina Beach Lake Park, Highway 421 & Atlanta Ave., Carolina Beach. Info: (910) 458-2977 or www.carolinabeachfarmersmarket.com.

Wilmington Farmers Market at Tidal Creek
8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Weekly gathering of vetted vendors with fresh produce straight from the farm. Sign up for the weekly newsletter for advanced news of the coming weekend's harvest. 5329 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. For info: thewilmingtonfarmersmarket.com.

Riverfront Farmers Market
8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside market featuring local farmers, producers, artisans, crafters and live music along the banks of the Cape Fear River. Riverfront Park, North Water St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtondowntown.com/events/farmers-market.

Taste of Downtown Wilmington
2:15 p.m., 2:45 p.m., & 3:15 p.m. A weekly gourmet food tour by Taste Carolina, featuring some of downtown Wilmington's best restaurants. Each time slot showcases different food. See website for details. Admission: $55–75. Riverwalk at Market St., Wilmington. Info: (919) 237-2254 or www.tastecarolina.net/wilmington/.

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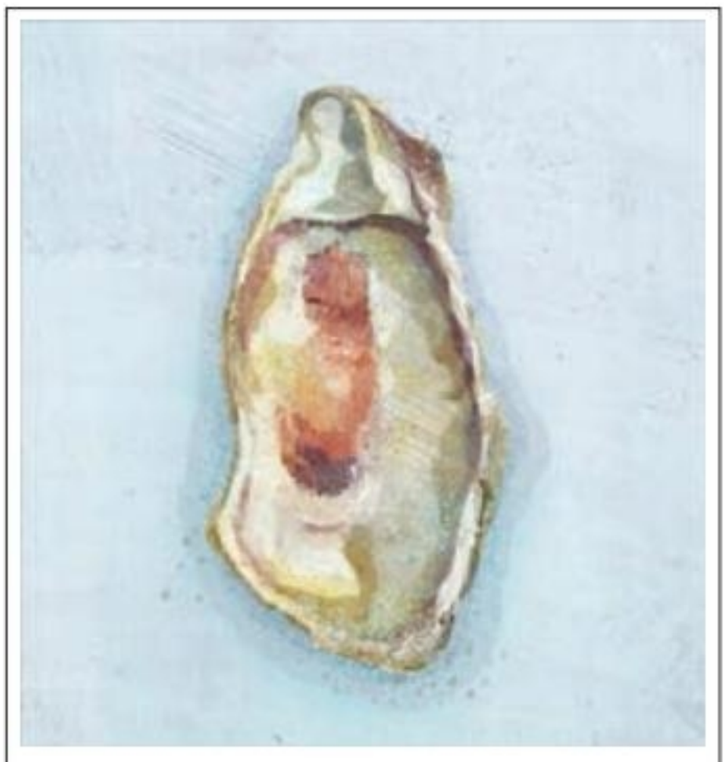

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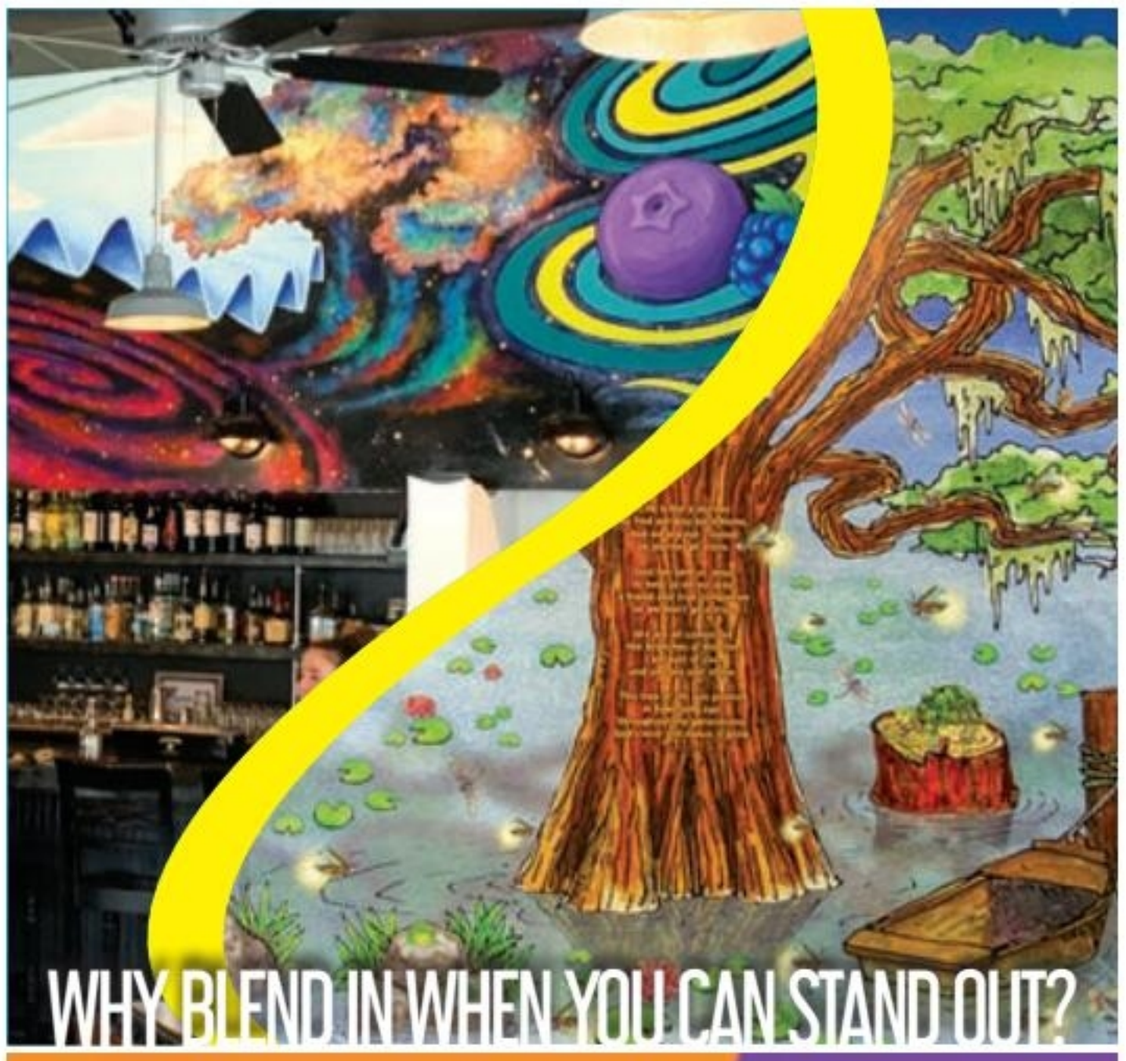

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Port City People

East Coast Shag Classic

A benefit for Hope Abounds

Friday, February 14, 2020

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Cheryl & Bobby Collins

Elizabeth & Kenny Barnes

Kenny & Elizabeth Barnes, Ken Jones

Debbie & Lloyd Bowden

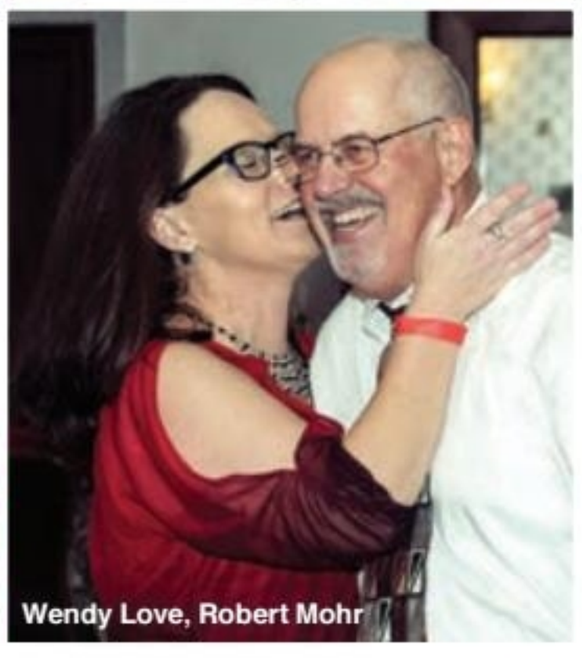
Gary Lowder & "Smokin Hot" Band

Steve & Judy Foster

Josie & Mose Highsmith

Robert & Jennifer Gunter, Brandia & Scott Bradshaw

Ron & Penny Mills


Wendy Love, Robert Mohr

Port City People

Cape Fear Heart Ball

Wilmington Convention Center

Saturday, February 22, 2020

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Melissa & Kate Gott, Matthew Lawson (Boys) William & Davis Gott

Stephanie Gerard, Leah Sander, Jessica Truax, Franco Buffalino, Alicia Walton, Miranda Garmenn

Livian Jones, Sharon Laney

Beverly Vanhook, Donald Stocks

Leah & Lenny Smith

Tommy Davis, Bo Dean, Sybil Stokes, Keith Anderson

Trish & Dr. Amit Datta

Katya & Dane Scalise

Dana Fisher, Jesse Pridgen, Monica Honea

Chris & Adrienne Harrington

Sonya & Alan Perry

Livi Dubel, Mark & Patty Vernon

Scott & Lisa Diggs

Port City People

Mardi Gras Celebration

Poplar Grove Plantation

Saturday, February 22, 2020

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Kenneth & Maria Powers, Margaret & Jon Richmond, Cassi & David Streif

Steven Spruill, Barbara Johnston

Shane Pizzuto, Micayla Allen

Shayla & Chad Cessna

Jane & Bill Cash, David Emery

John & Kathy Muzzey, Tricia & Rich Fisher

Rich Scharest, Jayme Bering

Andrew & Jennifer Groves

Hannah & Chrissy Fennell, Emily McInerney

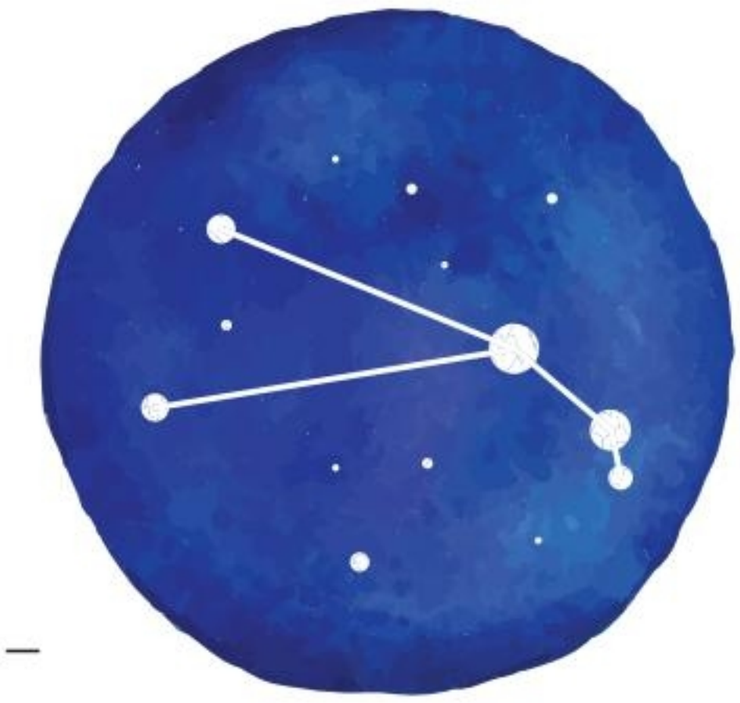
Carlyn Williams, Claire Lesko, Donna Emery, Tess Williams

Carole Drewry, Laura Visconti

Melony & Mark Culig

Straight Talk

Finding fault in the stars is for April Fools



By Astrid Stellanova

Excuse me, Star Children, but not everyone has been behaving. Allow me to draw you a map of your thoughts, which are more confusing than Rand McNally ought to allow: bat@#!t — as in going off road and heading straight for the state of chaos.

Yes, you have crossed that line.

Yes, you have used March madness for more than 30 days as your excuse. Nobody's buying it. Besides, it's April.

Don't be a fool. Get. A. Grip.

Aries (March 21–April 19)
You have been sprinkling a little sarcasm on evah-thang. Sugar, it seems to be the main spice in your life. Since you've ignored my advice, maybe I can interest you in some freshly ground sarcasm: Just for kicks, play it straight. There's a lot of serious drama to resolve, and you have got to get down to business.

Taurus (April 20–May 20)
There's a Fred Mertz for every Ricky Ricardo, and a Thelma for every Louise. Seems you have figured out the friendship shtick that keeps some (including you) laughing, but you will have to find your true center.

Gemini (May 21–June 20)
Always hug your enemies, so you know how big to dig the hole in the backyard! In this case, you have got a conflict that doesn't have to end in tragedy. But you knew that, and you just postponed the inevitable. Shovel not required.

Cancer (June 21–July 22)
Too glam to give a sweet patootie. You are that, and also secretly up against the realization that you do give a patootie. Your cool and contained image is very different from what you are feeling. Sync it up.

Leo (July 23–August 22)
They love you like biscuits love gravy. You love them back. But you feel taken for granted. Air this, get it out, get it over, and enjoy time with your inner circle. Make somebody else wash the dishes, Darlin.'

Virgo (August 23–September 22)
Criminal intent. That is what you have been nurturing since you found out that someone close to you hasn't owned up to something. Don't let this keep simmering. Vent, discuss, resolve.

Libra (September 23-October 22)
Everything may happen for a reason, but WTF? Did you actually intend for others to view you as a total jackass? No, you thought that nobody but you knew what had gone down. They know. And they are waiting for apologies.

Scorpio (October 23–November 21
The dramatic lie you tell yourself goes like this: Goodbye, Cruel World! But you aren't going anywhere. And nothing is really so bad that you cannot sort it out. When you stop kvetching, Sweat Pea, you'll see.

Sagittarius (November 22–December 21)
Run like your children are looking for you. A conniving acquaintance thinks they have got you in their control. If you cannot face them, then save yourself, Darlin', because they always talk you into mistakes.

Capricorn (December 22–January 19)
Alexa, open the bottle of pinot. Alexa, take out the trash. When Alexa truly starts being useful, you can relax your control on the control panel. But until then, practice makes perfect. Maybe practice waiting this one out, Sweet Thing.

Aquarius (January 20–February 18)
Acting like a bunch of skeeters on crystal meth? Or minnows about to meet Jaws' open mouth? But you didn't see it, Honey Bun, and nobody did. Calm down, and consider that sometimes the biggest virtue is to wait.

Pisces (February 19–March 20)
Mama needs her juice, Honey. I take one look at your star chart and realize you just wanted to slurp down a little happiness and get some rest. Worship at the temple of the plump pillow, and let life settle.

For years, Astrid Stellanova owned and operated Curl Up and Dye Beauty Salon in the boondocks of North Carolina until arthritic fingers and her popular astrological readings provoked a new career path.

Secretary Confidential

Please file this under: "What was I thinking?"

By Annie Gray Sprunt

Sometimes I look back at my life and wonder how I had enough sense to come in from the rain. After graduating from college, I knew I wanted to set off to seek my fame and fortune. But where? My mother didn't think the ratio of men to women was in my favor in Atlanta or D.C. and therefore, I would not be very successful finding a husband, so I moved to Boston. (For the record, I've been able to find two husbands, and the night is young.)

Nor did my parents have any confidence in my career potential. My father thought I would benefit from a stint in secretarial school, so off to the Katie Gibbs Secretarial School I went. Seriously. I learned how to type, file and shorthand. Not very titillating, but I learned some skills and was finally employable! My first job was with the investment boutique Hellman Jordan. It was a very prestigious firm, but I was the lowest woman on the totem pole. There were four executives, two accountants, another secretary and me. Every Monday morning, I would sashay into work and blab on about my weekend adventures, assuming they wanted to be my friend. They did not. They wanted me to zip my lip and be a secretary.

In hindsight, it was very wise to live out of town as I started my adult life. I could make my mistakes and missteps in a town where I knew nobody, and there would be no witnesses. At the time, I thought I had it going on but in retrospect, I was absolutely clueless. Sit back and enjoy as I share three examples while throwing myself under the bus.

Example One

When I was living in Boston, my best friend, Bettine, and I just knew we would run into John-John Kennedy. We would drag our secretary selves to the bar at the Ritz and wait for him to show up. We were barely able to pay our bills so we would sit at the bar and nurse our one and only martini, straight up with a twist, waiting for the bachelor of our dreams to walk in. Needless to say, he never did. And if he did, what in the world was I thinking? Young and clueless was fun at the time. Or was it delusional gall?

Example Two

I was never allowed to have a credit card growing up because my parents had even less faith in my financial prowess. They were right. This was back in 1987, and salesclerks would ask if you wanted to open up a store credit card. Well, yes, please! Ignorantly and unfortunately, I applied for a credit card at every single department store in Boston. The real tragedy was that it was never explained to me that it was not brilliant to only pay the minimum payment. Why would I pay $100 if I had the option to pay $10! Well, hello! I didn't have a clue what interest was and it didn't occur to me to read the fine print. (Ironic since I was working for a money management company.)

In no time, I couldn't even afford the minimum payments and was too mortified to tell my parents (if they had known, they would have thrown me in the loony bin). So off I go to get an additional job, telemarketing for the Boston Ballet. (Just so you know, I did extremely well because having a Southern accent was the secret sauce!) It took about six months working two jobs, but I paid off my debt and swore off credit cards.

Example Three

It's almost too humiliating to share, but it really did happen. If you can't laugh at yourself, you are missing a big opportunity.

Being from North Carolina, you know the drill — at the first hint of snow, schools cancel, milk and bread disappear from the grocery store shelves, liquor stores sell out, and we hunker in for the show . . . usually to get a total of 12 flakes. It was the end of September and lo and behold, it started to snow. I was snuggled up in my sofabed in my micro-studio apartment, in my Lanz flannel nightgown, smoking my Virginia Slim Light Menthols, drinking hazelnut coffee, blissfully watching *Good Morning America*. So happy to luxuriate with a snow day. It's exhausting being a typer and filer!

Well, the phone rings and my boss, indignantly, inquires where I might possibly be. I said, "IT'S SNOWING!" Duh, I thought, can't you see for yourself? I delusionally thought that the entire town of Boston would shut down at the threat of snow. It was the end of September, and I was wrong.

"Get here immediately!" he yelled into the phone. And I did. Let's just say that he never looked at me the same way again. But then I remembered that I had a brand-new Filene's Basement credit card. I trudged my sassy secretary self through the snow and charged up a new winter coat (fur may or may not have been involved; this was pre-PETA.) Then again, maybe it wasn't such a bad idea to have those credit cards after all!

Annie Gray Sprunt is a lifelong Wilmingtonian, award-winning mother, and self-deprecating bon vivant.

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